

Comment

What Kind of Economic Citizen? A Comment

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Abstract: Crowley and Swan (2018) proposed a categorisation of economic citizenship, in which they extend earlier work to include a new type, the discerning economic citizen. I argue that the discerning economic citizen is not a distinct type from the other three (the personally responsible economic citizen, the participatory economic citizen, and the justice oriented economic citizen). The underlying idea of whether an economic citizen is discerning or not instead represents a different dimension across which the goals of economics education could be conceptualised.

Keywords: economics education; citizenship education; economic citizenship

Economics educators have various goals in mind when they prepare and deliver their teaching to students. A common goal is for students to be introduced to ‘the economic way of thinking’ e.g., Heyne (2000) [1], with a view towards preparing them to be ‘good economic citizens’. This goal of promoting an economic approach to thinking is not new, and as early as the 1940s, Lindholm (1944, p. 239) [2] argued that: “[t]he indisputable trend of governmental activity toward increased control and initiative in economic matters requires in a democracy that the electorate be able to think intelligently upon economic problems. The general public must be economic literates not only in things concerned with the household economy but also in regard to the larger national and world economy.” The importance of a goal of developing economic citizenship became apparent from the 1970s, when the Joint Council on Economic Education (1976) [3] identified “responsible citizenship” as the goal of economics education (Fels, 1977) [4]. More recently, William Poole (former President of the Federal Reserve Bank of St Louis) noted that:

“[t]he importance of economic education goes far beyond the goal of improving understanding of the basic principles of supply and demand and the workings of our nation’s economy. Economics is the study of how people make sound choices. By studying how markets work, our young people also learn how to make efficient choices in managing their own scarce resources, such as time and money. Along the way, we teach them a decision- and choice-making process that they can apply to all aspects of their lives. These same skills are necessary to make informed choices as citizens—to decide which public policies to support and which to oppose.” (Poole, 1998) [5]

The goal of encouraging informed or responsible economic citizenship among our students is necessarily normative and subjective. There is no external standard against which good economic citizenship can be measured, and no exclusive set of principles that students should be expected to learn or learning objectives that students should be expected to attain. Consequently, even instructors who share a common goal to develop students into good economic citizens will have different models of good economic citizenship in mind. These differences in the conception of good economic citizenship will affect course development and delivery, as well as the examples used to illustrate economic concepts and models, and the assessment practices used to evaluate student learning.

In a recent paper, Crowley and Swan (2018) [6] present a set of four “archetypes” of economic citizen that may be interpreted as different conceptions of the informed or responsible economic citizen that economics educators could aspire for their students to become. The categorisation developed by Crowley and Swan (hereafter CS) builds on an earlier paper by Westheimer and Kahne (2004) [7]. Westheimer and Kahne (hereafter WK) developed a model of three conceptions of the “good citizen”: (1) the personally responsible citizen; (2) the participatory citizen; and (3) the justice oriented citizen. CS adopt the same three conceptions (albeit applied to economic citizenship rather than citizenship more generally), and add a fourth: the discerning economic citizen.

In this comment, I briefly summarise the WK conceptualisation of citizenship types, and discuss the extension of these types by CS to include a fourth type of economic citizen. I argue that the discerning economic citizen is not necessarily a distinct type from the other three. The underlying idea of whether an economic citizen is discerning or not instead represents a different dimension across which the goals of economics education could be conceptualised. The three types of (economic) citizen drawn from WK could each be considered as existing on some continuum from discerning to non-discerning, and the goals and specific learning activities of economics educators will therefore reflect a combination of goals measurable conceptually on two dimensions.

WK’s goal in developing a model of citizenship archetypes was “to call attention to the spectrum of ideas about what good citizenship is and what good citizens do that are embodied by democratic education programs nationwide” (Westheimer and Kahne, 2004, p.237) [7]. They used a mixed methods approach involving both quantitative and qualitative data, and incorporated feedback from the instructors who ran the programmes that were evaluated in the research.

Each type of citizenship was intended by WK to reflect “... a relatively distinct set of theoretical and curricular goals” (Westheimer and Kahne, 2004, p.241) [7] (p. 241). The *personally responsible citizen* represented a model of citizenship where honesty, integrity, self-discipline and hard work were emphasised. The *participatory citizen* was a model where active participation in civic life and community affairs was emphasised. Finally, the *justice oriented citizen* model emphasised students developing greater understanding of social issues. One of the attractive features of WK’s model is that the different citizenship types are not mutually exclusive, but instead form a nested structure. The participatory citizen does everything that the personally responsible citizen does, *and in addition* they are active in civic life and community affairs. Similarly, the justice oriented citizen does everything that the participatory citizen does, *and in addition* they seek greater understanding of social issues. Thus, WK’s model can be conceptualised as siting a collection of behaviours along a continuum from personally responsible at one end, to justice oriented at the other. Moving along the continuum from personally responsible to justice oriented, additional behaviours are added to those that the citizen embodies. WK’s model of citizenship types focuses on citizenship types within civic education, but sits within a broader literature on models of ‘good citizenship’, and is just one example of how good citizenship among adolescents or students can be characterised (for recent examples of others, see Geboers et al., 2015 [8] or Reichert, 2016 [9]).

Several papers have subsequently reviewed and extended the citizenship types of WK, with differing levels of success. Althof and Berkowitz (2006) [10] introduced the idea of a *knowledgeable citizen*, being someone who shares the desire for knowledge with the justice oriented citizen, but who lacks the desire for civic participation. Weinberg and Flinders (2018 in press) [11] add the *disenfranchised citizen*, who embodies neither personal nor collective responsibility and lacks criticality. However, while this citizenship type might exist, it is difficult to see why an educator would be interested in encouraging their students to aspire to be disenfranchised. Similarly, Ethier and Lefrancois (2012)’s [12] *social revolutionary citizen*, who would fight to overthrow the existing cultural order, might be appropriate as a goal for educators in only a limited number of education systems (and even then, attempting to encourage students in this way may imperil the educator themselves) (e.g., see Stalker, 1996) [13]. Others have extended the model of WK by integrating the perspectives

of other extant models (e.g., see Banks, 2018 in press [14]; Vesperman and Caulfield, 2017 [15]; Heinecke et al., 2016 [16]; Kuttner, 2015 [17]).

In their paper, CS also seek to extend the three citizenship models of WK, while simultaneously placing an economic citizenship lens over them. They then confirm these three economic citizenship models as present across a range of economics materials (online or in print) designed for use with K-12 students in U.S. schools. They also identify a fourth archetype of economic citizen: the *discerning economic citizen*, which they describe as a person who: “works to understand contemporary political, social, and economic issues by reading and analyzing a variety of media publications as a way of forming informed opinions about current and past events. The discerning economic citizen values multiple perspectives and formal and informal opportunities to discuss political, social, and economic issues with friends, family, co-workers, and community members” (Crowley and Swan, 2018, p.10) [6]. This type of economic citizen resembles the knowledgeable citizen described by Althof (2006) [10].

My reading of CS is that the defining feature of the discerning economic citizen is their engagement with data and the intensity of their desire to develop and share their understanding. It seems to me that the specific behaviours that exemplify this type of citizen could instead be enacted within each of the three other economic citizenship types. For instance, we can imagine personally responsible economic citizens who are less discerning (to use the term preferred by CS)—these citizens would undertake actions that are intrinsically rational to them, but don’t involve deep analysis of the range of costs and benefits associated with their action. In contrast, a more discerning personally responsible economic citizen would expend more cognitive effort in optimising their decisions for personal benefit. Similarly, we can imagine some participatory economic citizens who are more discerning and some who are less so. And equally for justice oriented economic citizens (although in this last case the descriptions of justice oriented citizens in WK and justice oriented economic citizens in CS suggest that the majority of these types of citizens would be discerning).

An argument could be made that the discerning economic citizen further builds on the behaviours contained within the justice oriented citizen, extending the nested structure of citizenship types from the original WK paper. However, this would suggest that all discerning economic citizens are also justice oriented, which seems unlikely and is not how the archetype was described by CS. Alternatively, one might conceive that the discerning economic citizen is an intermediate type between the participatory economic citizen and the justice oriented economic citizen. This would imply that all justice oriented citizens are discerning, which is again unlikely to be the case. Finally, one might suggest that WK’s continuum of archetypes diverges into two branches after the participatory economic citizen, where the behaviours of the participatory economic citizen are extended towards either justice oriented economic citizenship or discerning economic citizenship. However, aside from disturbing the neatness of WK’s nested structure of categories, this alternative conception precludes justice oriented economic citizens from behaviours characteristic of the discerning economic citizen, and vice versa.

All of this suggests to me that the discerning economic citizen is not a distinct type of economic citizen, but that we should instead consider economic citizenship across two dimensions. The first dimension is based on the *actions or behaviours* that the instructor is intending for their students to adopt. Notice that the models of the personally responsible, participatory, or justice oriented dimension originally introduced by WK and confirmed by CS all relate to definite actions or behaviours involving the application of students’ learning. As noted above, the actions or behaviours form a nested structure, where each (economic) citizenship type’s actions or behaviours encompass and build on those of other types (with the exception of the personally responsible economic citizen, which has the minimum set of actions or behaviours). The second dimension is based on *knowledge or critical thinking*, i.e., how the instructor intends their students to engage with data and research. In the model of CS, this is exhibited in whether the economic citizen is discerning or not. Students of all three of WK’s archetypes (personally responsible, participatory, or justice oriented) can be deeply engaged with data and research, and apply a high degree of critical thinking, or can be relatively passive and uncritical consumers of data and research, or indeed lie anywhere along some continuum between these two

extremes. Combining these two dimensions, and noting again that the categories are not mutually exclusive, leads to six ‘archetypes’ of economic citizen, combining the discerning (or not) dimension (knowledge or critical thinking) with the original categorisation of WK (actions or behaviours).

Ultimately, whether the appropriate categorisation of economic citizenship is into four, or six, or some other number of categories is an empirical question (and a necessarily subjective question at that). In order to identify whether the discerning economic citizen is a distinct archetype, or a sub-type of those other archetypes, involves consideration of educators’ goals in terms of students’ engagement with data and research. Specifically, do educators with a goal of developing personally responsible or participatory economic citizens downplay or ignore the importance of critical thinking and data? CS’s paper is based on a careful examination of instructors’ materials available for U.S. K-12 classes. A more thorough examination of classroom practices, course resources, and assessment practices, across all levels of economics education, and in non-U.S. contexts, is clearly warranted. This would not only allow researchers to examine the number of economic citizenship archetypes that instructors are preparing students for in practice, but also the relative frequency of these citizenship models in economics education. This would also enable best practice examples of pedagogical approaches aiming towards the different economic citizenship types to be clearly identified.

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