

Political and Civic Engagement among Free School Alumni: A Range of Outcomes

Kristan Morrison

Abstract

Civic and political engagement are at an inflection point in the United States. While some forms of engagement are on a negative path (e.g. contested civic education, dwindling community group membership), other forms are increasing (e.g. unionization, volunteerism, protests) (Atwell, Stillerman, Bridgeland, 2021). Many scholars and activists claim that one way to increase civic and political engagement is through civic education, yet most studies of civic education deal with conventional public schools. Minimal attention has been paid to the civic/political engagement potential of alternative forms of education. This article seeks to add to the relatively small body of knowledge about democratic free schools and their outcomes, especially as related to civic and political engagement. The Albany Free School (AFS) is a democratic free school where students self-direct their education. Such schools are part of a counter-hegemonic movement in the United States that dates back to the early 20th century and which has both anarchist and libertarian roots (von Duyke, 2013). Such schools purport to create spaces where students can develop critical authorial agency (Matusov, 2020) and habits/skills of engagement in the political/civic sphere. This article, based on data from interviews conducted with 18 alumni of the AFS, focuses specifically on discussions of alumni political and/or civic engagement and begins with a literature review defining how political and civic engagement manifests, and then moves into exploring the existing literature on the political/civic engagement-related outcomes of democratic free schools. This literature is mixed as to whether such schools are successful at nurturing such engagement, and the findings of the data collected

in this study confirm these mixed outcomes. The article concludes with a discussion of the paradox presented in democratic education between having no defined curricular endpoints and a declared set of characteristics and dispositions that are sought.

Keywords: free schools, alumni interviews, democratic school, educational alternatives, political and civic engagement

Political and Civic Engagement among Free School Alumni: A Range of Outcomes

Civic and political engagement are at an inflection point in the United States. According to Atwell, Stillerman, and Bridgeland in their *Civic Health Index 2021* report,

Overall, most trends in civic health have been on the decline, including stagnating levels of civic education, dwindling community group membership, and worsening interpersonal and institutional trust. At the same time, there are signs of a vibrant civic nation with increased rates of volunteerism, political knowledge, and casting ballots, and millions of Americans joining together to protest police violence against Black Americans and other communities of color. These trends suggest a duality in the nation's civic health. (p. 3)

Many scholars and activists claim that one way to increase civic and political engagement across all forms is through civic education (Atwell, Stillerman, Bridgeland, 2021; Hope, 2022; Jacobsen & Linkow, 2012; Winthrop, 2020;). Most studies of civic education deal with conventional public schools and only minimal attention has been paid to the civic/political engagement potential of alternative forms of education. This article seeks to add to the relatively small body of knowledge about democratic free schools and their outcomes, especially as related to civic and political engagement.

The Albany Free School (AFS) in Albany, NY is a private alternative school for students Prek-8th grade that was founded in 1969 by a group of individuals active in the struggles for democracy, equity, and the environment that arose in the 1960s (Mercogliano, 1998). This school, in part modeled on A.S. Neill's Summerhill School in England, is an example of a democratic free school where children are not compelled, as they are in conventional schools, to follow a standardized curriculum; rather, they may choose what, when, and how they study

something. If they so wish, they can completely abstain from attending classes, taking tests, or getting grades. Increasingly, such schools are identified as sites of Self-Directed Education (SDE) (Alliance for Self-Directed Education, 2021; Gray, 2017). In 2003, I spent three months at the AFS as an intern teacher/participant observer conducting research for my PhD dissertation. My work was later published in 2007 by the State University of New York Press under the title *Free School Teaching: A Journey into Radical Progressive Education*.

“What happens to the students when they grow up?” is one of the first questions that I am asked whenever I talk about my time at the AFS. And, after publication of my book, one book reviewer similarly expressed concerns, asking

Alas, one thing Morrison does not do in the final chapter is reveal what happens to students from the Albany Free School once they leave at the end of eighth grade. . . .Do they become active and engaged citizens? Is there evidence that their early school experiences were transformative? While that is material perhaps for another study, readers are left pondering these "so what" questions. Does such a dramatic departure from the traditional approaches to schooling make a meaningful difference? If the author had given at least a glimpse of how these questions were answered it might make the book more provocative. (Knapp, 2007, para. 9)

I was unable to systematically answer this question until now. At the time of the publication of my book, I only had anecdotal information from some of the families and teachers I kept in touch with, and there were just a few scholarly studies of democratic free school alumni that I could reference. Since that time, more studies have emerged of free schooling and unschooling (the homeschooling version of self-directed education) outcomes, and the children with whom I worked at the AFS in 2003 are now aged 18 to 35. I decided that the time had

finally come to seek answers for myself about the life outcomes of students who had attended the AFS. One particular life outcome I was interested in hearing about concerned their level of political and civic engagement/participation. Did these alumni, as the school's website claims, "learn valuable lessons about responsibility, problem-solving, social justice and most importantly, how to relate to each other"? And did they become people who "contribute positively to society, and become voices for change"? (AFS website, Mission, June 2022). Are they now "social justice warriors"? Semi-active democratic citizens? People who are complacent with societal systems and disengaged from politics and their communities? Or are they somewhere else along this spectrum?

The findings in this article come from a larger study on the life outcomes of AFS alumni and their perceptions/ judgements of unconventional schooling. My hope was that this larger study would provide valuable insights into what sort of people are nurtured at the AFS, whether their life outcomes are enhanced or harmed by such a school, and whether these alumni valued taking part in such an unusual form of education. The answers to these questions may have an impact on the public education sector, especially as some public and charter schools exist that are branching out into different approaches to education (Boston Public Schools, n.d.; Wagner & Dintersmith, 2016), and especially as our society engages more in existential questions on the purposes of education within a highly automated, post-industrial economy (Lerner, 2020; Matusov, 2020; Sukarieh & Tannock, 2020).

I have reported on the quantitative results of this data collection elsewhere (Morrison, 2022). In that article, I discussed, in general, alumni's present vocations, formal education, and values and levels of satisfaction with life and work. This article will drill down into the qualitative, narrative data related to alumni's discussions of their political/civic engagement.

Literature Review

What is the Democratic Free School Philosophy in Brief?

I first encountered the philosophy behind democratic free schooling in my doctoral coursework when I read A. S. Neill's *Summerhill School: A New View of Childhood*, and then encountered the concept (and the philosophies behind it) in the works of John Holt, Ivan Illich, George Leonard, John Taylor Gatto, Matt Hern, Chris Mercogliano, George Dennison, and Daniel Greenberg. Democratic free school proponents reject the conventional transmission philosophy of learning (Miller, 2004) where "objective" facts broken down into discrete, fragmented chunks, are memorized and then regurgitated. To democratic free schoolers (and many Progressive educators), learning is the construction of knowledge or meaning through activities that stem from an individual's choices and interests. By constructing knowledge, the proponents argue, individuals also construct themselves, a process called individuation (Lamm, 1972), and in being allowed to individuate, these students are in a better position to help create a world different from the one we now have, perhaps a world that has a different "bottom line" – different from society's overwhelming focus on profit maximizing, social mobility, and alienation and disengagement from civic life (Lerner, 2020).

Democratic free schoolers further argue that when conventional educators force children to engage with, memorize, and then regurgitate fragmented information, the students are being forced to engage in a socialization process – molding them into what it means to be a person in our society, a person who is alienated from her own purposes and interests, who feels powerless when confronted with "authority;" basically, a person un-equipped with the knowledge of how to act as an autonomous entity within a broader societal sphere (Gatto, 1992; Giroux, 1978; Illich, 1971; Jackson, 1968, 1990). According to proponents of democratic free schooling, the

conventional educators' conception of education is for the purpose of perpetuating the status quo, a status quo that they find objectionable in a free and diverse democracy. These educators argue that education should promote creativity and problem-solving, develop an openness to conflicting perspectives, nurture strong critical capacities, and encourage a passion for shaping the world into one that is more equitable, compassionate and humane.

Anarchist vs. Libertarian Roots of Democratic Education and Implications for Political and Civic Engagement

The notion that democratic free schools should nurture students' passion for shaping the world in a particular fashion is somewhat contested within the literature on such schools, mainly because these free schools have multiple philosophical roots, some of which lie in the anarchist school of thought and others of which lie in the libertarian school of thought. Katherine von Duyke, in her 2013 dissertation on autonomy-centric schooling, explores and differentiates these different roots. She wrote,

The roots of the democratic school innovation stretch back to the early part of the twentieth century, and occur in two forms, though histories of democratic education tend to merge the anarchist and libertarian streams. Both schooling branches are intertwined and share some common influences and history, but they are not one and the same movement. The anarchist movement strives to develop a new society, while the libertarian branch . . . [had] no agenda [for] a particular kind of political society, and the only agenda for bettering society was conceived of as emerging from emotionally whole persons. (p. 90-91, 97)

In my research on the Albany Free School, I have found that the people who work in these schools (and are thus the leaders of its practices and hopes) are somewhat conflicted on

whether the school should seek any particular endpoints/characteristics and dispositions. For example, when I was studying the school in 2003, I explored with teachers the fine line between modelling the quest for a new society vs. compelling/instructing students to engage in that quest. Teachers stated

Most of the teachers that are at the school are active in working for [left-leaning] social change and it's part of the reason why we're in a school like this, but we're careful not to impose that on the kids. (Morrison, 2007, p. 105-106)

And

I never once coerced a kid to do anything active; I think that's the worst thing you could do, to teach them that you have to be coerced into being an activist, that's horrible! (Ibid, p. 106)

And

I do think it is subtle. . . I don't think that you can negate the fact that whenever you're in anyone's presence that . . . you have an effect and they have an effect. . . . I prefer to lead a horse to water, but I won't make him drink. (Ibid, p. 106)

Yet, even given the above statements from teachers implying that they do not compel or expect students to engage in civic or political life (libertarian strand), the website for the school currently states a more anarchist position, that students will “learn valuable lessons about responsibility, problem-solving, *social justice* and most importantly, how to relate to each other” and that they “encourage students to . . . *contribute positively to society, and become voices for change*” (AFS website, Mission, emphasis mine, June 2022). Thus there seems to be some inherent contradictions on the end goals of this particular democratic free school.

What is Political/Civic Engagement?

At this point, it seems useful to define what political and civic engagement are before going into the literature on whether democratic free schools do, in fact, nurture such involvement in their students. Such a definition could form the basis of an entire article; for the sake of brevity and clarity, the definition used by Jacobsen and Linkow (2012) in their Working Paper #74 for the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement is useful here. In it, they write,

Drawing upon the work of Verba, Scholzman and Brady (1995), we define participation in political life as those activities which have “the intent or effect of influencing government action – either directly by affecting the making or implementation of public policy or indirectly by influencing the selection of people who make those policies” (p. 38). Voting is by far the most discussed political activity, but the category of participation in political life includes many more activities such as writing to an elected official, participating in a protest and donating time and/or money to a political campaign. Participation in civic life, which often occurs in non-governmental organizations, is characterized by voluntary work that is focused on getting along with and helping others or working to solve community problems (Zukin et al. 2006). Unlike political engagement, civic engagement is less directly aimed at affecting the electoral process or policy formation. Activities such as working on a community improvement project, participating in a fund-raising run/walk/ride and law-abiding behaviors are examples of civic engagement. (Jacobsen & Linkow, 2012, p. 6)

In addition to the above definitions, education scholars Joel Westheimer and Joseph Kahne (2004) have identified three types of citizens who uphold democracy and maintain a democratic society, a typology that I will reference in the discussion section.

Personally responsible citizens value individual contributions to the overall good of their community and demonstrate these values through socially responsible civic engagement, like following the law, recycling, and volunteering. They value character—being honest, working hard, and having respect for oneself and others. *Participatory citizens* value contributions to the social and political life of their local, state, and national communities. They are interested not only in the character and moral value of the community but in the collective governmental and organizing work that supports it. Participatory citizens focus on forms of civic engagement that help them understand and shape the policies and procedures of the community. *Justice-oriented citizens* are also interested in collective civic engagement to support and improve the community but are not interested merely in upholding the status quo. They are instead dedicated to understanding and dismantling systems of oppression to improve social conditions. (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004, p. 5, italics original)

Research on Alumni of Democratic Free Schools and Their Political/Civic Engagement

Do democratic free schools nurture the sort of participation detailed in the section above? While alumni research on students who attend democratic free schools is not overly abundant, it is not completely absent either. A number of such schools have attempted to track their past graduates' life outcomes. Studies have been done by and about the Sudbury Valley School (SVS) (Gray & Chanoff, 1986; Greenberg & Sadofsky, 1992; Greenberg, Sadofsky & Lempka, 2005; Greenberg, n.d.; Holzman, 1997) and other schools, both those modeled after the SVS and those un-connected (Circle School, 2015; Gray, Riley & Curry-Knight, 2021; Hope, 2018; Lucas, 2011; Mercogliano, 2003; Rietmulder, 2019), including one public democratic/open school (Posner, 2009). On the topic of civic and political engagement, the literature is somewhat

mixed. A number of the studies conclude that the alumni are tolerant and interested in justice and active citizenship. For example, Greenberg (n.d.), one of the founders of the Sudbury Valley School in Massachusetts, wrote that alumni

are empowered. They do not accept authority unquestioningly in social settings . . . They are keenly aware of their rights, their strengths, their ability to stand for what they believe. . . They speak up for themselves and for others.

They are tolerant. SVSers are deeply respectful of other people, and accepting of all the many differences that distinguish us from each other. They do not form *a-priori* judgments of people according to their color, their religion, their political views, their social standing, their clothes, their hair, their language, their age, or their demeanor.

They have a deep sense of justice. They are highly sensitive to social ills, and to wrongs that are inflicted upon victims. They understand deep inside them that what creates a stable and livable social order is a system of justice that deals fairly with everybody, is accessible to everyone, and has avenues of redress and appeal.

They are articulate. They are superb conversationalists; they know how to talk, how to get an idea across. They are also excellent listeners, and they understand that to have a good conversation where all parties benefit, all parties must listen as well as talk.

They are politically astute. SVS graduates understand how to use the existing political system in order to further their aims. They know how to present their ideas, how to petition, how to debate, how to muster support for their positions among their friends and acquaintances. They know how to formulate political positions, and how to go back to the drawing board and re-formulate them in a more acceptable fashion if they have to.

(Greenberg, n.d., italics original)

And Max Hope, in her 2018 book *Reclaiming Freedom in Education*, cited multiple studies that conclude that democratic free schools help develop citizenship skills. She wrote,

The development of “citizenship skills” for students is vastly aided by being participants within functioning self-governing communities and mini-democracies (Hope 2012a; Maitles and Deuchar 2006; Maitles and Gilchrist 2006; Coffield and Williamson 2011). (p. 95). . . .Experiential learning (learning by doing) – which is the way that students in free schools usually learn about citizenship – offers a far more productive way for students to engage at a deep level. Through having responsible freedom and being accountable for the impact of their own actions on others, they learn to be active and constructive members of communities. . . . Students in these self-governing communities clearly demonstrate a deep commitment to themselves, each other and the school as a whole (Hope 2010). Given the increasing global concerns about the alienation of children and young people from political processes and from communities, this is highly significant. (p. 96)

Rick Posner (2009), in his study done of the alumni of the Jefferson County Open School in Colorado, argued that his data indicates that a “full 98% of alumni say they are taking action to create the world that ought to be in their work [as adults] or in their personal and community lives” and he provides a two-page appendix of examples of alumni’s social action work (p. 197).

Studies done by Marguerite Wilson (2015, 2016) on a now-closed Sudbury Valley-inspired school, however, question this finding that democratic free school alumni become politically and civically active. For example, Wilson, argued that students at the Central Valley Sudbury School (CVSS) became socialized within neo-liberal values that emphasize a focus on the self and which “reduce the potential of Sudbury education to instill a collective sense of

social responsibility” (Wilson, 2016, p. 6). And in her 2015 study on the same school, she documented “undemocratic realities” in which certain, privileged, students dominated the democratic meetings at the school:

The pretense of egalitarianism served to obfuscate the persistence of hierarchy, differential access to participation and inequality along the lines of age, gender and prior experience. Despite an idealistic goal of egalitarianism, the educational community at CVSS structured participation in such a way that School Meetings became a space of disempowerment where most community members were not able to fully participate in the decision-making process. (Wilson, 2015, p. 134)

These observations led Wilson to conclude that there was potential for students/graduates to take away dis-empowering lessons from their democratic free school experiences.

Related to this empirical work on democratic free schools and anti-democratic outcomes is the work of critics of homeschooling who argue that any form of “exiting” from public schools (be it homeschooling or private schooling even of the most democratic form) is related to a family’s desire to focus only on what is best for the family’s private interests (Apple, 2000; Riegel, 2001). And the fact that parents make these “exiting” choices thus models for their children alienation from the public sphere and an abdication of public responsibility to others (Clayton & Stevens, 2004; Lubienski, 2000, 2003; Reich, 2002). While these authors’ works were not directly related to the outcomes of democratic free schools, they do offer interesting food for thought.

Methodology

Original Research Site: The Albany Free School

The Albany Free School, as mentioned earlier, is a private school in Albany, New York.

It serves children who are preschool ages to the 8th grade. Chris Mercogliano, former director of the school, details the school's history in his 1998 book *Making It Up as We Go Along*. The school began in 1969 as a homeschool in the home of Mary Leue. Her son was unhappy with his school, so he asked his mother to teach him at home and she agreed. After a bit of bureaucratic wrangling, Leue got official sanction for home schooling her child. A friend soon asked Leue to take on her three children who were also unhappy with their schooling experiences; and over the next few years, other adults and students joined, and the school was born. The baseline philosophy of the school developed out of the teachers' beliefs about education and society. Many of the teachers had read about and been intrigued by A. S. Neill's Summerhill School (libertarian), the Modern School (anarchist) in New York City at the turn of the 20th century, and the histories of various other holistic/progressive educational movements, and they wanted to develop a school that exemplified some of the tenets of these schools and movements. Leue and the other teachers were very active in the struggles for democracy and humanity (e.g. Civil Rights movement, Women's Rights movement, etc.) that arose in the 1960s and they wanted a school that typified the values of those movements: dignity and autonomy for all people through empowerment and individual choice, as well as a sense of communion with others and the natural world. The teachers envisioned an egalitarian model in which children would be free of competition, compulsory learning, and social class-based status rewards. They thought that school should be a place where the students could choose responsibly from open-ended sets of options, because only in this way would they ever learn to chart their own life courses (Mercogliano, 1998).

The Albany Free School is unique amongst democratic free schools in the United States in that it is located in a very low-income community and offers a sliding scale tuition that can

slide all the way to zero for families interested but unable to pay (Davis, 2017; Mercogliano, 1998). This enables the school to have an economically diverse student body, but also limits it to a shoestring budget. Given this economic reality, the school has grown and shrunk in enrollment over the years. At the time that I interned at and researched the school in the fall of 2003, there were approximately 55 pre-kindergarten to grade eight students, about seven to eight paid teachers, a paid cook, and numerous temporary and full-time volunteer/intern teachers. In 2019, I visited the school and found about 40 students, 4 paid teachers, and a paid part-time cook.

Data Collection and Analysis

In 2019, I began to engage in a convenience sampling with snowball recruitment of AFS alumni. Starting with Facebook contacts and individual email addresses of AFS alumni, teachers, and parents that I have accumulated since my time researching the school in 2003, I issued invitations to former students who were at least 18 years old and had attended the Albany Free School for at least 3 years. I asked them to take part in a qualitative study involving semi-structured narrative interviews (or a survey format, if they preferred to answer questions in writing), and I invited them to put me in contact with any other alumni that they knew of to take part. I reached out directly to over 50 alumni and a handful of other alumni were also given the information in a second-hand manner. 18 individuals provided informed consent to take part either by answering the questions via Qualtrics survey software (3 participants) or engaging in a 60-90 minute phone interview with me (15 participants). Table 1 below provides demographic information about the participants.

Table 1

Participant Information at the time of the interview (Data in this table is analyzed more fully in Morrison, 2022, with comparisons to the U.S. population in general).

Average age at time of interview and further breakdown	27 (range was 19-37) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 6 participants ages 19-23 • 7 participants ages 25-27 • 5 participants ages 32-37 		
Average number of years attended the Albany Free School	7.7 (maximum possible is 11 years, age 3 – 8 th grade)		
		<i>n</i>	%
Gender	Females	8	44%
	Males	9	50%
	Unknown (anonymous survey respondent)	1	5%
Ethnicity	White	17	94%
	unknown (anonymous survey respondent)	1	5%
Have children at time of interview?	3 children	2	11%
	2 children	2	11%
	1 child	1	5%
	No children	13	72%
Marital status at the time of interview	married	6	33%
	divorced or separated	2	11%
	never married	10	55%
Financial independence at	4-year degree-seeking, financially dependent on parents	3	17%

time of interview	financially independent (some with some debt, others with none)	15	83%
Did the alumni receive a high school diploma? If so, how?	No diploma - Dropped out/homeschooled*	1	5%
	Graduated from public high school	8	44%
	Graduated from private high school	4	22%
	Got GED (either on own, with help from private high school, or with help from community college)	5	28%
Highest education post Albany Free School at the time of interview	attended a trade school (for photography)	1	5%
	attended some, or were in process of attending, community college	6	35%
	earned a Bachelor's degree or were currently in a 4-year degree program	9	47%
	earned a Master's degree	2	12%
Current employment at time of interview	Full-time student, no job	3	17%
	Full-time parent, no outside job	1	5.5%
	Between jobs (one had been honorably discharged from military and was training to re-enter military as Navy SEAL; one was getting ready to start new job in two weeks)	2	11%
	Employed full time	12	66.7%

*The one individual who did not get a HS diploma did go on to graduate with a Bachelor's from a 4-year college.

As one can see in the table, respondents were a roughly even mixture of male and female. Of note, though, is that the overwhelming majority of respondents are white, which is inconsistent with the racial breakdown of the school (at the time of my original study in 2003, approximately 25% of the students were people of color). Reasons for the over-representation of white alumni are unclear. Perhaps because I am a white woman, more alumni felt comfortable responding to the invitation to participate? Or perhaps there was something about my sampling technique that only drew in white respondents; I am not sure.

The interview questions posed to the participants were a mixture of questions seeking quantitative answers and those seeking qualitative responses. The qualitative questions related to political and civic engagement included the following: 1) In what ways did the AFS help them to understand and deal with the world that is (the “real world,” while they were students)? 2) Did the school influence them as to their willingness and ability to create the “world that ought to be” (meaning do they now actively work to change the world to meet their ideals)?

After conducting the phone conversations, I transcribed them verbatim and combined them with the written survey responses. I then analyzed the data by reading through all the transcripts and written responses, identifying initial themes, then re-reading all documents to code answers for these themes and generalized conclusions (Gibbs, 2007).

Findings Related to Political and Civic Engagement of Alumni

Alumni Perceptions of Understanding and Dealing with the “Real World” – Political Engagement

When asked about how the AFS influenced their understanding of how to interact with the “real world” (the world outside of the microcosm of the school), seventeen out of the eighteen participants in this study related memories of political and civic engagement during

their time at the AFS. In terms of political involvement, all seventeen mentioned going to or being invited to take part in protests. The AFS is located within very easy walking distance of the New York State Capitol and so there were ample opportunities for students and teachers at the school to observe and/or take part in events for various causes. The alumni mostly remember protests that were advocating left-leaning positions (e.g. anti-gun, racial equity for both African-Americans and Native Americans, Occupy Wall Street, legalizing midwifery, altering Columbus Day to Indigenous People's Day, and climate justice).

In addition to their proximity to the state capitol, the school was also very connected to a Peace Pagoda/retreat, which led to other opportunities for activism. In 1983, school staff heard about the work of the Nipponzan Myohoji order of Japanese Buddhists and about Hank Hazleton, an activist for the environment and Native American rights. Hazleton donated the land for the Nipponzan Myohoji to build a Monument of Peace in Grafton, NY (about a 40-minute drive from the Free School). The Japanese Buddhist Nun, Yun Yasuda (Jun-San) who stewards the property, welcomed teachers and students from the AFS who came to help with the building of the Monument to Peace (Peace Pagoda). Jun-San often engaged (and still does) in walks for peace or protests against nuclear weaponry and AFS students and teachers frequently accompany her. A number of the alumni mentioned Jun-San and joining her in her activist efforts, and former teacher Nancy Ost mentioned in an email to me that AFS students walked 18 miles with her one year to honor the Mohawk peoples. In the later 1980s, the school obtained the remainder of Hazleton's land in Grafton to be used as an outdoor education site, and have been the conservators of the land since then, again offering the students opportunities for engagement in their community and environmental stewardship (Grafton Peace Pagoda website, n.d.; Ost, personal communication, July 15, 2022).

While some alumni were able to clearly remember the causes of the protests they were attending and remembered being passionate about them, about one-third of those who participated in this study only remembered the protests themselves, not the purposes of them. Yet, many still believed that they learned something positive from them. For example, one alumna stated,

Even if the kids aren't even saying anything [at the event], they are seeing that others are making a statement. And I think that's really important. When I was a student, I'd go to protest. That really showed me that you may not be able to completely up and change things that you don't like, but [you] can at least show up...have our voices be heard, that's a really big statement.

And another stated,

AFS brought me to protests when I was 7 years old. The community taught me from a very young age to speak out if you think something is wrong. This taught me to question authority and value my own opinions even if they differ from the status quo. It's empowered me to end conversations/ relationships with people who are being blatantly disrespectful in their opinions of societal issues. It's also encouraged me to find ways to help in any way that I can.

However, not all alumni who could not recall the purposes of the protests remember them so positively. For some, they were just neutral experiences. One alumna stated "I remember going to protests, but I don't remember feeling very strongly, necessarily about anything." And another alumna stated

I mean I was young so I didn't know what these things meant. I don't think it necessarily matters, per se. There was one, I think it was like when it was a Occupy Wall Street

protests were going on, I remember 99% and I had no idea what I was saying. Or having that memory and being like, what even is this?

Other alumni mentioned feelings of some sort of pressure to conform with group norms in going to the protests. One alumnus stated

I took part in a lot of the protests that went on. I don't know if I really understood what I was going there for at the time. I think I was probably just trying to go along with what other people were doing. I didn't really make an effort to understand exactly what was going on. I just kind of wanted to be on the right side, you know.

Another alumna recounted a time when her 7th/8th grade age group was on one of their annual trips and were coming through Philadelphia on their way back to Albany when a protest rally to support Mumia Abu-Jamal (political activist and journalist convicted of murdering a police officer) was happening.

On the way back, our teacher had found out that there was a protest in Philly. . . So our teacher was like, guys we should go. And we all voted, and I said strongly, I didn't want to go because I guess going to a protest kind of scared me and if I'm not really like, I hate violence that kind of stuff. And I had that in my head that the protest wasn't the right path. And we went, I think I blacked out. I don't. I don't remember what happened. . . I remember like vaguely driving through and getting more and more anxious and I think we made a few signs or we met up with some other teachers from the Free School there. . . And I remember talking to one of the interns and I was just like, that I'm really nervous. She's like, it's fine. Like if you really need to stay in the van, like, you know. Do that, that'd be fine. So yeah.

There is a sense from the above anecdotes that some of the students felt pressured to take part in

the political actions that their teachers (and perhaps other students) were passionate about. In addition to the two alumni quoted above, another two spoke on this topic. One alumnus critiqued the AFS teachers for valuing such activism over other subjects. She stated,

Plenty of times they [the teachers] did push stuff. A lot of times it was more related to politics. And I didn't disagree with it. It was more the, "Well since you come and tell us you think we should do student activism around XYZ, why don't you come and remind us that we're supposed to go to algebra class?"

Another alumnus never fully argued that he felt coerced; rather, it was more of a mild push that depended on the teachers. He stated,

I think AFS primarily demonstrated this [political engagement] via activism based in protest and in my later years attracted folks [new teachers] that were somewhat homogenous in their left-leaning political beliefs. Again, the older teachers that were there for a long while create[d] an environment where even though they were "radical" in their approach to education, [they] never crossed a line (or rarely is probably more accurate) when it came to politics in school and I think that helped me form my own beliefs. . . I feel strong and confident in my convictions, which is probably the free thinking the Free School cultivated without indoctrination.

Alumni Perceptions of Understanding and Dealing with the “Real World” – Civic Engagement

While some students expressed mixed feelings about the degree to which political engagement was modeled by the adults in the school, there were no mixed feelings about the civic engagement activities that happened at the AFS. For example, nearly all of the study participants mentioned overall positive feelings about the school's council meetings (meetings

that could be called by anyone at any time that were mandatory for the school members— students and teachers— to discuss problems and issues that arose; for more details on such meetings, see Morrison, 2007). They spoke of how these meetings led to feelings of empowerment to solve problems, and empathy and compassion for others' situations.

Other civic engagement actions that the alumni recalled in a positive light included the annual trips for the age-group students, trips which almost always had a service component to them. These were trips that usually happened at the end of the academic year (May or June) and that the students had done almost all the planning and fund-raising for. For the younger children, these were usually day trips, but for the 7th/8th grade-age students, these were one to two-week trips to various places in the country by van or plane. Alumni recalled trips to New Orleans to help with Hurricane Katrina recovery, to beaches in Georgia to help with beach clean-up and sea turtle protection, and even trips to Puerto Rico to help build houses and take part in coral reef protection.

Did the AFS Lead Alumni to be Politically or Civically Engaged as Adults?

Given the above political and civic engagement as children, did the AFS alumni become people inclined to such engagement as adults? The data I collected on the question of “did the school influence you as to your willingness and ability to create the ‘world that ought to be’?” seem to indicate that alumni have a range of engagement, from some being fully engaged to others being cynically dis-engaged. One alumna wrote me a year after our initial interview stating,

I graduated with my MA then went to intern in the US House of Representatives for [a representative] from Nevada. I primarily worked on labor and education policy research, as well as budgeting and constituent services. After Covid hit, I joined the Joe Biden

Campaign in Florida as a field organizer. Clearly, the Free School prepared me for this role as my main duty is mobilizing grassroots action which was reflected in the FS's community focus and dedication to democratic values. While organizing from home in Albany, NY into Florida - literally working from home directly across the street from the FS - me and my friend _____, who also went to the FS, founded the Youth Political Alliance. This organization's goal is to increase youth participation in politics in Albany through education, activism, and running candidates with progressive platforms.

I would put the above alumnus at the fully engaged-level of engagement along with the alumni who chose "helping" or non-profit careers, including teaching (3 alumni), US military (1), community non-profit and social services occupations (3). There is also an alumnus who, although he works in the for-profit sector, is an executive in a social impact investing group, so even within the for-profit world, there is a political/civic element to his work. The above individuals represent 75% of the participating alumni who were employed at the time of the data collection (the other 6 were/are self-employed artists, full-time students, or stay-at-home parents).

For both those alumni who chose helping careers and those who are in other fields, there is good evidence that they are somewhat politically and civically engaged as adults. The majority of participating alumni mentioned engaging in some volunteer work in their free time – doing things such as coaching swim lessons or swim teams (2 different alumni); organizing with the community; providing free legal aid; and volunteering with the Jesuit Corp, NYCORE (education and race activism organization), soup kitchens, urban tree health maintenance, and after-school music programs for underserved communities. More politically-oriented work mentioned included things like donating to politicians and political causes, taking part in

protests, attending political rallies, volunteering for certain political candidates, regularly voting in every election, writing to representatives, and community organizing around poverty, immigrant rights, anti-gentrification, or Black Lives Matter. Of the eighteen participants, only 5 gave no evidence of being civically or politically engaged. Of those five, two stated that they were, nevertheless, very engaged in reading about politics and approached things with an open mind.

Two alumni stood out for their cynical viewpoints on political and/or civic engagement, indicating that they had no interest in any sort of activism, but that they considered themselves to be individual good actors. One alumnus, who was living and working overseas at the time he filled out the survey, stated that he was

. . .very cynical about activists. A lot of people who tried to build a better community found it thankless. Others seemed to just be virtue-signaling or using activism like a fashion trend to get attention. The neighborhood near AFS is as bad as it ever was. There is a reason I have moved far away. If I am helping in any way, maybe it is just through common kindness and respecting everyone I interact with. But I am not creating any kind of world. I am just happy being middle class and drinking coffee in my air-conditioned apartment on a Sunday morning. . . I am quite averse to a lot of world building, especially if it involves, white middle class people getting paid to work with poor minorities and have zero-effect. I am also averse to ideology.

I will quote the other alumnus, a military veteran's, responses in greater length below

Interviewer: Are you active in any sort of political or social justice circles?

Alumnus: No. Not even a little bit.

Interviewer: Is that something that you're rejecting or is it that you're just not involved?

Alumnus: Yeah, I see a lot of naivete in a lot of the people that get involved in social justice. I mean, most of them haven't had a job. Most of them don't have families. I'm just one guy. It's just from what I've seen. Like the social justice community that I've been involved in, it's usually young college kids. They've never really had a real job. They've never had to suffer. They're young. They don't know the way the world works.

Interviewer: They're too idealistic?

Alumnus: Yes. Idealism has superseded pragmatism to them, and they don't necessarily see how their ideals translate into the real world. Or maybe they don't want to. I think it's so complicated, but it's something that I'm not interested in in the least bit. . . Left or Right.

Interviewer: Okay, but I guess what I'm wondering is do you think that the Albany Free School prepared you to navigate the world as it is, and maybe even helped to create the world that could be, however that world is in your view?

Alumnus: No, it did not prepare me for the way the world is. But it did prepare me to help. It gave me the tools as well as the caring compassion to help. . . And I do every chance I get, just something small, you know. . . When I was a cook, I would get an employee meal. I never really ate it; I would always give it away. So, I would take the sandwich. I was driving along, and I just happened to see this guy begging for change. I said "Hey man, you want a nice sandwich? I just made it." And he said "absolutely, yes." And I'll do stuff like that all the time. I just try to help you know. I see some old lady carrying groceries and I'm like, "oh my goodness, she's got to be 85 years old." So, I'll go over like, "excuse me do you need some help? I can help you." . . . I think there's far more value in controlling what you can control. I'm not going to change anything in

Washington, even with 100,000 people saying that I want this to be this way. What I can change is that I fed a man for a day. I helped an old lady get her groceries in her house, and she didn't break her hip falling in. I gave a young boy my bicycle because I don't ride it, and maybe his parents can't afford one. . . If everybody acted like that, if everybody acted nicely and cared for people like that, then we wouldn't have the need for enormous rallies like that.

Discussion

There seems to be evidence that the studied alumni are almost all citizens who help to uphold democracy and maintain a democratic society, although in different ways. The typology of citizens outlined earlier, developed by Westheimer and Kahne (2004), has relevance here. The two alumni whom I (and they themselves) characterized as cynical would fall into the “personally responsible citizens” category in that they focused on their individual contributions/good actions. Then there would be the few, like the man who now runs (with another AFS alumnus who did not participate in this study) an organization to increase youth participation to support progressive political leaders, who could clearly be categorized as a “justice-oriented citizen” because he is not interested in merely upholding the status quo and is working to dismantle systems of oppression. Were there any “participatory citizens” who contribute to their civic and political communities in ways that help them understand and shape policies and procedures of the community? Given the left-leaning political interests that many of the alumni expressed, I would be comfortable asserting that the bulk of the studied alumni would fall somewhere between the “participatory citizens” and “justice-oriented citizens” in this typology.

Do all democratic free schools have alumni who have the level of civic/political engagement evidenced in this study? Democratic free schools vary widely. Katherine von Duyke, whose dissertation I mentioned earlier, examined the differences between a democratic free school that focused much more on a libertarian viewpoint (the teachers there tried very hard not to “contaminate” the children with their perspectives) and one that had more leanings to the anarchist roots in that the teachers focused on an ideal future outcomes and personal characteristics, especially as related to logic, reasoning, and criticality (von Duyke, 2013). The AFS seems to fall into that more anarchist category as well; however, there is a distinct paradox built in to this gap between libertarian vs. anarchist leanings in a democratic free school. When schools are designed to give children agency, they tend to not outline any particular curricular endpoints, but curricular endpoints can go beyond subject area content, they can also be related to dispositions and characteristics. If a school is set up in a way that emphasizes and values community, personal agency, and active involvement, doesn't that mean that creating students with these dispositions is a sort of set curricular endpoint for the school? Going back to the AFS website, it does seem that the school has a set end goal of their students learning “valuable lessons about responsibility, problem-solving, social justice and most importantly, how to relate to each other.” They seek people who “contribute positively to society, and become voices for change”? (Albany Free School website, Mission, 2022). Is this indoctrination? Where is the line between modeling and imposing? I wish I knew the answers to these questions.

The findings of this study are consistent with the literature detailed earlier regarding the positive life outcomes of democratic/free school alumni in the realm of political and civic engagement, but it also leads us to question whether all democratic free schools actualize their democracies equally well (e.g. Wilson's critique discussed earlier). Overall, I believe that this

research helps add to the evidence that the democratic free school model seems to be one that results in positive life outcomes for the alumni as well as for society overall, and is not a model to fear (as many people do). For example, if we know that volunteerism makes for a more positive society, then we should be pleased to see that around 75% the AFS alumni engage in some form of volunteerism as compared to the 30% of the US population who engaged in volunteerism in 2019 (Schlachter, 2021).

Limitations

There are, of course, caveats to all the findings in alumni studies. For example, establishing a causal relationship between the school's approach and the life outcomes of its alumni is impossible (Chertoff, 2012). The data in these studies (including this one) is often anecdotal and thus heavily subjective, and self-selection bias suggests the possibility that only those most confident, empowered, and satisfied with their lives as well as those most engaged in their communities take part in such studies and thus skew the overall results (for after all, isn't taking part in such a study a form of volunteerism/civic engagement?).

Another limitation to this study was (rightly) pointed out by one of the reviewers of this piece—the formation of some of my questions was leading. This reviewer's comments are worth being quoted in full:

I think two questions the author asked are almost certainly leading. To all participants, the interviewer asked “did the school influence you as to your willingness and ability to create the ‘world that ought to be’?” This strongly incents respondents to either respond with an affirmative – who wants to deny that they have tried to create the world as they want it to be? – or – as two respondents did – defend their decision not to, likely in response to the interviewer's expectation that they would. To another respondent, the

interviewer asked whether they were “active in any political or social justice circles?”; even with the “or,” I worry that the implication is that unless one’s cause or activity has to do with what is (conventionally classified as) social justice, it wouldn’t count as an activity worth mentioning. (The respondent reported cynicism that seemed directed not toward activism as such, but toward “social justice” activism; would this person—who after all, WAS involved in the military—have had a different response if they were asked the more neutral question of whether and to what degree they have participated in political or civic activity?)

Another limitation to the findings of the research done is that many of the studied alumni’s family environments may have had a more powerful impact on their life outcomes than the school they attended. For example, parents of alumni may have been particularly active in political and civic spheres, which then nurtured certain characteristics and dispositions in their children. A number of the respondents mentioned their own confusion about how much to attribute their life outcomes to the school or to their family upbringing (some of the alumni had extremely active/engaged parents). Further, the families had the cultural and social capital (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990) to make the privileged choice of sending their child to a private school (even if tuition was close to zero); such capital might have also influenced the alumni’s level of political and civic engagement (e.g. led them to the conclusion that activism/engagement can lead to desired outcomes or led them to the conclusion that pursuing one’s own interests to the detriment of the social body is acceptable). Lastly, having the time to take part in an interview or survey is a form of cultural capital, one that not all possible participants may have had. Sadly, with this sort of research, a truly representative sample is very difficult to achieve,

especially without a much more intrusive methodology, but such a methodology could perhaps be devised.

Conclusion

Democratic free schools offer a window into the advantages a democratic society could garner if it educated its children in a manner that walked the walk of democracy rather than just talking the talk (through largely empty symbolism such as Student Government Associations, pledges of allegiance to the flag, singing of national anthem at sporting events, etc.). Meta reviews of research done in conventional schools on the effectiveness of civic education has shown that civic education programs have tenuous and mixed evidence for whether these programs result in more active engagement (Manning & Edwards, 2014); whereas the data in this study indicate that the free school approach seems to result in more active engagement. Maybe it is time that all schools attempted to allow their students more critical authorial agency (Matusov, 2020) by adopting more democratic practices and modeling. It is worth citing again Hope's (2018) statement from earlier because it has relevance to this study as well

Experiential learning (learning by doing) – which is the way that students in free schools usually learn about citizenship – offers a far more productive way for students to engage at a deep level. Through having responsible freedom and being accountable for the impact of their own actions on others, they learn to be active and constructive members of communities. . . Students in these self-governing communities clearly demonstrate a deep commitment to themselves, each other and the school as a whole (Hope, 2010).

Given the increasing global concerns about the alienation of children and young people from political processes and from communities, this is highly significant. (p. 96)

References

- Albany Free School. (2022, June 27). Mission. <https://www.albanyfreeschool.org/>
- Alliance for Self-Directed Education (2021). *What is Self-Directed Education?*
Online at <https://www.self-directed.org/sde/>.
- Apple, M. W. (2000). Away with all teachers: The cultural politics of home schooling.
International Studies in Sociology of Education, 10(1), 61–80.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09620210000200049>
- Atwell, M.N., Stillerman, B., & Bridgeland, J.M. (2021). *Civic health index 2021: Citizenship during crisis*. <https://ncoc.org/national-reports-ty/civic-health-index-2021-citizenship-during-crisis/> Civic, National Conference on Citizenship, and the University of Virginia’s Miller Center and Democracy Initiative and the Partnership for American Democracy.
<https://ncoc.org/national-reports-ty/civic-health-index-2021-citizenship-during-crisis/>
- Boston Public Schools. (n.d.). What is a pilot school?
<https://www.bostonpublicschools.org/Page/4682>
- Bourdieu, P. & Passeron, J.C. (1990). *Reproduction in education, society, and culture*. Sage Publications Inc
- Chertoff, E. (2012, December 12). No teachers, no class, no homework; would you send your kids here? <https://www.theatlantic.com/national/archive/2012/12/no-teachers-no-class-no-homework-would-you-send-your-kids-here/265354/>
- Circle School (2015). Graduates in 2015: College attendance, academic degrees, and occupations [PDF file]. <https://circleschool.org/wp-content/uploads/Circle-School-Grads-in-2015-July-30-2015.pdf>

Clayton, M., & Stevens, D. (2004). School choice and the burdens of justice. *Theory and Research in Education*, 2(2), 111–126.

Davis, R. (2017, June 30). Dreams of a “real community.” *Greenfield Recorder*.

<https://www.recorder.com/Dreams-of-a-real-community-11023929>

Gatto, J.T. (1992). *Dumbing us down: The hidden curriculum of compulsory schooling*. New Society Publishers.

Gibbs, G. R., (2007). *Analyzing Qualitative Data*. SAGE Publications, Ltd

Giroux, H. (1978). Developing educational programs: Overcoming the hidden curriculum.

Clearinghouse, 52(4), 148-151.

Grafton Peace Pagoda. (2022). <https://www.graftonpeacepagoda.org/>

Gray, P. (2017). Self-directed education—unschooling and democratic schooling. In G. Noblit (Ed.), *Oxford research encyclopedia of education*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Online at <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190264093.013.80>

Gray, P. & Chanoff, D. (1986). Democratic schooling: What happens to young people who have charge of their own education? *American Journal of Education* 94(2), 182-213.

Gray, P., Riley, G., & Curry-Knight, K. (2021). Former students’ evaluations of experiences at a democratic school: Roles of the democratic processes, staff, and the community of

students. *Other Education: The Journal of Educational Alternatives*, 10 (2), 4-25.

Greenberg, D. & Sadofsky, M. (1992). *Legacy of trust: Life after the Sudbury Valley School experience*. Sudbury Valley School Press.

Greenberg, D., Sadofsky, M., & Lempka, J. (2005). *The pursuit of happiness: The lives of Sudbury Valley alumni*. Sudbury Valley School Press.

Greenberg, D. (n.d). Outcomes. <https://sudburyvalley.org/essays/outcomes>

Hern, M. ed. (1996). *Deschooling our lives*. New Society Publishers.

Holzman, L. (1997). *Schools for growth*. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Hope, E.C. (2022). *Rethinking civic engagement: How young adults participate in politics and the community*. Brennan Center for Justice. <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/rethinking-civic-engagement>

Hope, M. A. (2018). *Reclaiming freedom in education : Theories and practices of radical free school education*. Routledge

Illich, I. (1971). *Deschooling society*. Harper and Row.

Jackson, P. (1968, 1990). *Life in schools*. Teachers College Press.

Jacobsen, R. & Linkow, T.W. (2012). *The engaged citizen index: Examining the racial and ethnic civic and political engagement gaps of young adults* (CIRCLE Working Paper No. 74). The Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement. https://circle.tufts.edu/sites/default/files/2020-01/WP74_EngagedCitizenIndex_2012.pdf

Knapp, P. (2007, November 14). *Book review of "Free School Teaching."* <https://www.tcrecord.org/content.asp?contentid=14766>

Lamm, Z. (1972). The status of knowledge in the radical concept of education. In D. Purpel and M. Belanger (Eds.) *Curriculum and the cultural revolution* (pp. 149-168). McCutcheon.

Lerner, M. (2020). Don't waste an economic meltdown: A strategy to replace capitalism. *Tikkun*. https://www.tikkun.org/dont-waste-an-economic-meltdown?fbclid=IwAR0WIVWNmk-f_KDjiN3CTALPDdaCPvw2GUz6X_NsgTj3mzb2z_x7GCmCBYY

Lubienski, C. (2000). Whither the common good? A critique of home schooling. *Peabody Journal of Education*, 75(1/2), 207–232. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1493096>

- Lubienski, C. (2003). A critical view of home education. *Evaluation & Research in Education*, 17(2/3), 167–178. doi/abs/10.1080/09500790308668300?journalCode=revr20
- Lucas, H. (2011). *After Summerhill: What happened to the pupils of Britain's most radical school?* Pomegranate Books.
- Manning, N. & Edwards, K. (2014). Does civic education for young people increase political participation? A systematic review. *Educational Review*, 66(1), 22–45.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00131911.2013.763767>
- Matusov, E. (2020). *Envisioning education in a post-work leisure-based society: A dialogic perspective*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Mercogliano, C. (1998). *Making it up as we go along: The story of the Albany Free School*. Heinemann.
- Mercogliano, C. (2003). *Teaching the restless: One school's remarkable no-Ritalin approach to helping children learn and succeed*. Beacon Press.
- Miller, R. (2004). Educational alternatives: A map of the territory.
<http://www.educationrevolution.org/store/resources/alternatives/mapoflandscape/>
- Miller, R. (2014). *Self-organizing revolution: Common principles of the educational alternatives movement*. Alternative Education Resource Organization.
- Morrison, K. (2007). *Free school teaching: A journey into radical progressive education*. State University of NY Press.
- Morrison, K. (2022). Albany Free School alumni: Life outcomes. *Other Education*, 11(2).
<https://www.othereducation.org/index.php/OE/article/view/323>
- Neill, A.S. (1960). *Summerhill*. Penguin Books.
- Posner, R. (2009). *Lives of passion, schools of hope*. Sentient Publications

Reich, R. (2002). The civic perils of homeschooling. *Educational Leadership*, 59(7), 56–59.

<http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership/apr02/vol59/num07/abstract.aspx>

Riegel, S. (2001). The home schooling movement and the struggle for democratic education.

Studies in Political Economy, 65, 91–116.

<https://jps.library.utoronto.ca/index.php/spe/article/viewFile/6714/3713>

Rietmulder, J. (2019). *When kids rule the school: The power and promise of democratic education*. New Society Publishers.

Schlachter, L. H. (2021). Key findings from the 2019 current population survey: Civic engagement and volunteering supplement. AmeriCorps, Office of Research and Evaluation.

https://americorps.gov/sites/default/files/document/2019%20CPS%20CEV%20findings%20report%20CLEAN_10Dec2021_508.pdf

Sukarieh, M. & Tannock, S. (2020). Deschooling from above. *Race and Class*, 61(4), 68-86.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/0306396819889294>

von Duyke, K. (2013). *Students' autonomy, agency and emergent learning interests in two open democratic schools*. (Publication No. 3595010) [Doctoral dissertation, University of Delaware]. ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global.

Wagner, T. & Dintersmith, T. (2016). *Most likely to succeed: Preparing our kids for the innovation era*. Scribner.

Westheimer, J. & Kahne, J. (2004). What kind of citizen? The politics of educating for democracy. *American Educational Research Journal*, 41(2), 237–69.

<https://doi.org/10.3102/00028312041002237>.

Wilson, M. A. F. (2015). Radical democratic schooling on the ground: Pedagogical ideals and realities in a Sudbury school. *Ethnography and Education*, 10(2), 121–136.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/17457823.2014.959978>

Wilson, M. A. F. (2016). The traces of radical education: Neoliberal Rationality in Sudbury student imaginings of educational opportunities. *Critical Education*, 7(6).

https://orb.binghamton.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?filename=0&article=1006&context=hdev_fac&type=additional

Winthrop, R. (2020). *The need for civic education in 21st century schools*. Brookings Institute.

<https://www.brookings.edu/policy2020/bigideas/the-need-for-civic-education-in-21st-century-schools/>

Biography:

Dr. Kristan Morrison teaches foundations of education courses for undergraduate and graduate students at Radford University in Radford, VA, USA. Her research focus is on student-directed learning. Dr. Morrison has widely published and presented on schools and homeschool learning environments which allow children high levels of autonomy in what they study and how, and she also consults regionally, nationally, and internationally with schools seeking to develop such approaches.