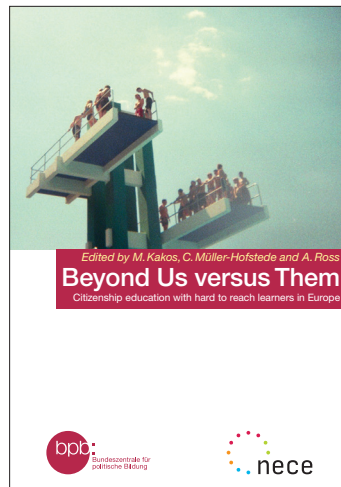# Democracy & Education

The First Step in Addressing Inequalities.

A Book Review of *Beyond Us versus Them: Citizenship Education with Hard to Reach Learners in Europe*

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MANIFEST IN THE literature on "hard-to-reach" populations is the confounding process of defining the phrase *hard-to-reach*, the move toward more representative nomenclature (e.g., "vulnerable," Day, 2013) in lieu of the phrase *hard-to-reach*, and the seriousness of consequence in reevaluating and restructuring the principles and purposes that drive proposed engagements with "hard-to-reach" populations. The confluence of these dimensions contributes to the complex, multilayered intricacies inherent in understanding the "hard-to-reach." In *Beyond Us versus Them: Citizenship Education with Hard to Reach Learners in Europe*, Kakos, Müller-Hofstede, and Ross (2016) assembled a volume of contributions from researchers and scholars that offered insight into how we might begin to understand "hard-to-reach" populations and suggestions for facilitating citizenship education for, within, and amongst these populations. The volume offered ways to redefine a traditionally and historically imperialistic approach to "hard-to-reach" populations and argued for "build[ing] power with them" (Hargreaves & Fullan, 1998, p. 44) by listening, reflection, and responsiveness over projection, dictation, and mandates as the ways in which we both understand "hard-to-reach" populations and explore possible interventions.

The editors began their volume with an introductory chapter that offered a generously robust framework within which to contextualize each of the papers, which were then previewed in a well-articulated, thematic survey. Kakos et al. (2016) outlined the origins of the phrase *hard-to-reach*. They tracked the various constructs that the phrase *hard-to-reach* has metamorphosed to encompass, such as the social sciences and education. They delineated the trajectory from the "ignorant housewife," who was targeted by advertisers, to individuals who were tacitly categorized as resistant to and unaware of public health issues and whose activities and behaviors were perceived as ethically and socially objectionable, to "the marginalized," who, in education, became synonymous with the hard-to-reach.

The editors suggested that this oppressive stance has been constructed from the perspective of the privileged, and they proposed a paradigmatic shift in both the discourse toward an empowered, active, and educated citizenry and the role of the privileged toward that objective, as well. At its core, the hard-to-reach have been at the center of presumed good will and best intentions by those professing not only an understanding of the needs of the hard-to-reach, but the best ways in which to address them. This volume suggested that one of greatest challenges for the hard-to-reach resides in the lack of understanding by the well-intentioned and the perhaps even sinister motivations of those interested in exploiting a population that they have deemed incapable of advocating for itself. If we are genuinely committed to affecting change in the lives of the hard-to-reach, we need to be supportive partners rather than engineers facilitating actions based on unilateral determinations of who is, in fact, hard-to-reach and what their needs may or may not be. For example, are the individuals who have been deemed hard-to-reach deserving of that classification or are the hard-to-reach isolated individuals for whom resources are, in fact, inaccessible (Evangelou, Coxon, Sylva,

Smith, & Chan, 2013)? Some of the chapters in this volume suggested removing barriers and inviting the perceived hard-to-reach into comfortable settings and dialogic engagements where their voices could be heard.

In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire (2014) said:

> To exist, humanly, is to name the world, to change it. Once named, the world in its turn reappears to the namers as a problem and requires of them a new naming. Human beings are not built in silence, but in word, in work, in action-reflection. (p. 88)

Having "named" the individual parts of a complex circuitry, the editors provided their readers with a schema within which to make sense of the implicitly nuanced complexities of the hard-to-reach. The authors of each of the chapters in *Beyond Us versus Them: Citizenship Education with Hard to Reach Learners in Europe* contributed to the examination, investigation, evaluation, diagnosis, inquiry, reflection, and critique of a more democratic and evolved conception of hard-to-reach populations and the mindful and responsive interventions that exhibit great promise.

A survey of each of the chapters spoke to the depth and breadth with which the editors have attempted to address the complexities inherent in the hard-to-reach. The contributions to this compendium lend themselves to assembly into multiple matrices by, for example, region, discipline, and approach through studies from across continental and political boundaries, settings (e.g., schools, libraries, and prisons), empirical studies, and proposed interventions. Chapter 2, by Kakos and Ploner, addressed how the notion of hard-to-reach is applied to communities and the ambiguities in the definitions of the term. Chapter 3, by Beach, discussed the subordination of subgroups in Sweden. Chapter 4, by Vávrová, Hrubeš, and Čáp, explored how libraries in the Czech Republic actively engaged members of socially-excluded communities. Chapter 5, by Matos and Lopez, argued that inviting foreign-language readers to engage with literature can empower them to develop agency and exercise citizenship. In Chapter 6, Karakatsani and Katsamori argued that citizenship education empowers prisoners and highlights for their teachers and tutors an opportunity for prisoners to understand their rights and responsibilities as citizens. Chapter 7, by Pertjis, discussed approaches by and the underpreparedness of teachers in the Netherlands to facilitate these discussions in their classrooms around controversial issues. In Chapter 8, Hirsch questioned whether educational interventions helped liberate marginalized groups or if these well-intentioned interventions simply reinforced dominant categories, such as class, gender, and ethnicity. In Chapter 9, Ahmadi, Behrendt, and Müller-Hofstede discussed a project in 30 schools in Germany that used dialogue to reframe the way in which hard-to-reach groups were captured in the political and cultural contexts of school citizenship education. In Chapter 10, Newman and Turner England described how the effort to create community-led after-school programs intended to bridge the gap between formal and informal education for hard-to-reach populations. In Chapter 11, Pagoni argued that schooling in France mirrored the norms and values of the privileged and that participatory citizenship held promise for integrating hard-to-reach

students. In Chapter 12, Ross addressed state citizens who were categorized as members of a minority group and, as a result, marginalized as a hard-to-reach group. In Chapter 13, Carpenter and Taru's study refuted the notion of politically apathetic youth and claimed that youth believe that education has not prepared them for participation in political engagement, thus fueling the chasm between youth and formal politics. In Chapter 14, Remache explored renewed educational practices designed to address the hard-to-reach and their needs.

This volume's microcosmic exploration of renewed educational practices is representative of global efforts (e.g., China, Japan, Australia) toward citizenship education. While some of the chapters engaged the myriad issues that are still fundamentally implicit in the challenging issues around the hard-to-reach, others highlighted a shift toward recasting the "hard-to-reach" in name and deed from the ignorant and marginalized to an educated, sentient citizenry with the knowledge and license to participate in civic engagement. Researchers and scholars focus on wrapping the hard-to-reach into interventions as stakeholders, not as objects of good will and elicit feedback from their stakeholders because they recognize that "sensible goals require constant reformulation in light of what happens as we try to achieve them" (Engel, 2000, p. 55). The exploratory, investigative, and experimental provenance of the interventions is facilitated by researchers and scholars but shared amongst all stakeholders as the interventions themselves offer democratic engagements and citizenship education that begin to tap into and take iterative direction from the participation of an increasingly educated and informed citizenry. By recognizing that "participation stands the best chance of advancing civic virtue (and civic virtue stands a good chance of advancing participation) when diverse, heterogenous groups of citizens struggle together to solve public problems" (Oakes, Quartz, Ryan, & Lipton, 2000, p. 50), the proposed interventions make room for all groups of citizens with divergent perspectives to be active participants in their own agency. As stewards of their own experiences, the once-hard-to-reach can no longer, by definition or default, be marginalized, and the perception of their abilities to engage can no longer be supplanted by the privileged. They become, instead, an informed and engaged citizenry that is equipped and prepared to participate, actively and democratically, in its community and contribute to the plans and decisions that address its needs. This powerful recalibration of power constitutes a significant shift in the way in which citizenship education is both understood and implemented since the focus must be articulated and even driven by the very same population that it serves and, to that end, empowers.

In conclusion, understanding the needs of the hard-to-reach from the landscape and context of the hard-to-reach is the first step in providing services and interventions that address inequalities in areas, such as health and education. To reach the hard to reach, it is incumbent upon educators, researchers, and policymakers to derive and maintain a well-informed perspective of the needs and services required by the very population for which they are intended.

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