CLASSROOM RECITATION OF THE PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE AND ITS EDUCATIONAL VALUE: ANALYSIS, REVIEW, AND PROPOSAL

LAURIE J. BENNETT, University of Denver

ABSTRACT: The daily recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance in public school classrooms has been mandated by numerous state legislatures, resulting in much controversy and not a few lawsuits. In one Colorado lawsuit, both sides based their respective cases on the Pledge's purported "educational value" or lack thereof, but neither defined what "educational value" meant nor cited any factual support for its presence or absence. This omission prompted this review of the literature to determine if any studies defining or quantifying the educational value of the Pledge had been completed, and, finding none, to craft a beginning definition of "educational value" for the Pledge that would permit design of a research study to ascertain its purported value in the classroom. Literature on the Pledge and on citizenship education helps to solidify a definition of the Pledge's "educational value": its ability to transmit shared values of community, loyalty, respect, and patriotism in the context of increasing social diversity and fragmentation and, even, war. The article then follows this possible definition in order to state a potential research question, and reviews a number of studies on citizenship education that provide examples of quantitative instruments and qualitative interview and observational approaches that could be deployed to study this question.

September 11, 2001, was a horrific event for the United States. The impact of the event revealed itself in many ways. Although some individuals played out their myriad griefs in solitude, many took time out of their daily routines to gather, to talk, to touch—to seek out connection with others. Churches and synagogues were full. Places of business and schools held moments of shared silence. People needed to be with other people. "In the aftermath of September 11, people [were] hungry for social rituals and eager to communicate a deeper sense of national belonging."1 They looked for symbols and rituals that could unite them and forge bonds of community anew.

One symbol that resonated powerfully with many Americans at this time was the American flag. One ritual that seemed to offer comfort and connection—or at least appeared to be used with that end in mind—was the recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance. Days after September 11, President Bush led a "nationwide Pledge of Allegiance." It was introduced over the public address system of many schools and institutions with words such as the following:

Good morning. We will now be standing today to say the pledge of allegiance in unison, as one country. The whole country will stand together to declare our strength and unity with all of America in this time of crisis. Please stand and salute so that we may join our country in saying the pledge.

In the wake of the 9/11 crisis, many state legislatures attempted to tap sources of "strength and unity," like the Pledge, as part of their continuing efforts to shape public school agendas through legislative mandates. Indeed, the next year saw a "flurry of bills" throughout the nation requiring schools to begin the day with the Pledge of Allegiance, to post the motto "In God We Trust" in classrooms, or to add patriotism classes to the curriculum. By mid-2002, half the states required schools to offer the Pledge during the school day, and five

 Interestingly, it was during another time of profound social dislocation—the period between the Civil War and World War I, when the United States was both recovering from its severe and self-inflicted war wounds and trying to absorb major waves of immigration from countries not hitherto heavily represented among U.S. citizenry—that today's Pledge of Allegiance was first drafted and popularized. At that time (the 1890s), Pledge boosters were attempting to mobilize the masses, and, in particular, American youth, to support patriotism and national unity. See Cynthia E. O'Leary, To Die For: The Paradox of American Patriotism (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), pp. 150-171; see also Morris G. Sica, "The School Flag Movement: Origin and Influence," Social Education 54 (October 1990): 380-384. (The ironic fact that Francis Bellamy, the author of the original Pledge text and cousin of Looking Backward author Edward Bellamy, was a committed socialist, is not widely known.) Although attention to the value of Pledge recitation has waxed and waned across more than a century, movements to incorporate the Pledge into daily school life have arisen during times of war throughout the 20th century. See O. L. Davis Jr., "Schooling in the Service of the State: Great War Contributions to Changed Educational Purpose." In Explorations in Curriculum History, ed. Sherry L. Fled and Lynn M. Burkhart et al. (Greenwich, CT: Information Age Publishing, in press).


additional states introduced bills to that effect. Colorado's bill failed in 2002, but passed and was signed into law in 2003.

The increased emphasis on a particular compulsory patriotic exercise in the schools stemmed from more than just the 9/11 crisis atmosphere. Many authors and policymakers have expressed concern about the decline in civic engagement or attention to public life in the U.S. population generally, and among young people in particular. A Subcommittee on Civic Education of the federal judiciary has noted that “a high level of civic disengagement, especially among the young, demands a re-commitment to education for active and effective citizenship.” Many state governments have embraced the mandating of the Pledge as part of such a “re-commitment.” As one Connecticut legislator opined,

I can't force patriotism, but if I never teach patriotism, I can't build the base for it. We were getting away from patriotism in this country. For generations we all said the Pledge of Allegiance. We should be doing that for our children.

The mandating of the Pledge in public schools is controversial, with many individuals challenging the authority of the state to compel students and teachers to speak words of national loyalty and patriotism. It has given rise to a raft of costly litigation for those states seeking to enforce such a mandate. In light of the controversy about the potential threat to First Amendment freedoms and the budgetary costs, a legitimate question may be posed: Is it worth it? Does the recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance in U.S. schools actually do what its sponsors believe that it is supposed to do? Does the Pledge succeed in instilling patriotic values in our youth? Does intoning the

---


Pledge every day harness a sense of "strength and unity," or does it create a sense of connection or community in the nation's classrooms? Does this daily ritual build or strengthen a foundation for increased levels of public engagement as citizens among young people? Does saying the words of the Pledge promote understanding of the concepts articulated in it, such as "allegiance" or "liberty" or "justice for all?" Does the daily Pledge add anything to citizenship education at all?

The end that the Pledge supporters expect its daily school recitation to accomplish is not entirely clear. Also not clear is how we would determine if, in fact, that desired end is being met. This review sought research that may illuminate both ways of defining the objectives that promoters of the Pledge aim to achieve, and ways of measuring whether these purposes are being achieved.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Court Challenge to the Pledge—Does It Have Pedagogical Value?

In the summer of 2003, new legislation required all Colorado public school teachers and students to recite the Pledge of Allegiance daily, with a few limited exceptions. A lawsuit (Lane v. Owens) was filed soon thereafter, challenging the statute on First Amendment grounds. The challenge rested primarily on a U.S. Supreme Court decision (West Virginia State Board of Education v. Barnette) that held unconstitutional a mandatory Pledge requirement that had no exceptions and imposed criminal penalties. The state of Colorado's defense relied largely on another U.S. Supreme Court case about school newspaper censorship (Hazelwood School Dist. v. Kuhlmeier). That decision held that public schools do not offend the First Amendment as long as their actions are reasonably related to legitimate pedagogical concerns. In the briefs and hearings that followed, the debate centered on whether, in fact, daily recitation of the Pledge by schoolchildren does indeed have legitimate pedagogical value.

---

10 See section 22-1-106(2), Colorado Revised Statutes. The statute's exceptions allow both students and teachers to decline to say the Pledge for religious reasons or if they are not U.S. citizens; they allow only students to be excused from saying the Pledge for other reasons with written parental permission. The crux of this First Amendment challenge involves the unreasonable limitations and discriminations imposed by the exceptions to the Pledge mandate.

11 Lane v. Owens, Civil Action No. 03-B-1544 (D. Colo.).


The State of Colorado argued that mandating the Pledge is the state’s effort to transmit patriotic virtues and values; that “recitation of the Pledge is part of the educational mission of [the] public schools”; and that it is justified by “the state’s strong educational interest in requiring a healthy respect for our national symbols.” The challengers to the law argued, on the contrary, that “the Mandatory Pledge law cannot be defended as advancing legitimate curricular objectives because it promotes no educational goals.” The court sided with the plaintiffs and enjoined the state from enforcing the statute in the schools. The basis for its ruling was that “pure rote recitation of a pledge . . . cannot be said to be reasonable or legitimate in a pedagogical sense” and that “there is no legitimate or reasonable educational value to it.”

Although the outcome of this case clearly turned on whether the Pledge does or does not have any educational value, neither the litigants nor the court relied upon a single fact or research study to support their positions. None of them really defined what it would mean for the Pledge to possess the value alleged, or how that value could be assessed in practice. It was this reliance upon assertions—without any facts to support them—that prompted me to look further for studies to shed light on whether or not the Pledge might have some kind of demonstrable educational value.

Research Studies About the Pledge

Research about the Pledge of Allegiance is almost nonexistent. In fact, only two studies appear to be relevant, and that relevance is only partial.

One researcher surveyed 90 preservice and inservice teachers about their agreement with the statement that “public school students should be required to participate in the Pledge of Allegiance and flag salute ceremony.” This study sought to measure the attitudes of teachers toward the legal rights of public school students regarding

---

mandatory patriotic school exercises, in light of the *Barnette* case’s holding that such students could *not* be required to say the Pledge without exception. The study found that, despite the law’s clear dictates, a large percentage of both sampled teacher groups agreed that students should be required to say the Pledge. Additionally, the study concluded that further work needed to be done to improve teachers’ attitudes toward students’ rights.

Unfortunately, the focus of this study did not really address the question begged by the Pledge litigation: Does the Pledge have an educational role in transmitting values of citizenship and patriotism, and if so, what is that role?

The second report was a very informal summary of a casual inquiry of 20 preschool children who recited the Pledge daily. They were asked about what words they said in the Pledge and what the words meant. Their answers revealed that they had converted the Pledge into their own versions of its words and meanings, bearing little if any relationship to likely adult meanings of the words or the meaning of the Pledge itself. Subsequently, the author inquired how this daily routine related to the reasons why their teachers had the children say the Pledge in the first place. This researcher outlined four reasons offered by an unspecified number of teachers: (1) “a desire to promote loyalty and love for our country, starting at an early age”; (2) “a wish to instill respect for the American flag”; (3) another way to prepare children for future public school routines; and (4) “a way to ‘know’ what America stands for and that they’re fortunate to be free.” The author concluded, with almost no reported analysis, that the Pledge was not an effective way to instill the asserted values in young children: “Rote group recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance does not seem to be a desirable early method to use in helping young children grasp these abstract concepts.”

This article shed a glimmer of light upon the potential classroom value of the Pledge and why that value might be unrealized in practice with small children. It made no pretense of being a substantial inquiry, and its brevity and superficiality offered little solid information about how one might go about, first, defining more

---

18However, this research did not inquire about the reasons that these adults held these beliefs. Quite possibly, these two groups’ beliefs are representative only of the sentiments held by the general U.S. population.

19Ibid.

20Jill E. Witherell, "To Pledge or Not to Pledge—Is That the Question?" *Young Children* 47 (January 1992): 64–65.

21Ibid.: 64.

22Ibid.
deeply what educational value saying the Pledge might have, and second, exploring the realization of such value once better defined.\textsuperscript{23}

To formulate a better definition of the impact and value of the Pledge in the eyes of educators, the search for evidence led to other scholarly literature on the role of the Pledge in U.S. classrooms.

\textbf{Scholarly Literature on the Pledge: The Debate}

Debate about the appropriateness of ritual recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance has been lively and public. That debate appears to have two legs. It concerns, first, the effectiveness of daily recitation of the Pledge as a methodology for promoting citizenship values, and second, the desirability of the values themselves promoted by the daily saying of the Pledge.

Those who oppose ritual pledging believe that simple repetition of the words of the Pledge—whether compelled or not—is a poor and inadequate method for teaching its contents and meanings. In a fascinating discussion—really a case study—of an ugly Madison, Wisconsin, controversy regarding the local school board's flouting of a post-9/11 state legislative mandate of school patriotic observances (including the Pledge), Michael Apple noted that a prime reason behind the board's voting \textit{not} to require the Pledge was that "the law seemed the wrong way to teach patriotism. Rote memorization was not the best approach if one actually wanted to provide the conditions for the growth of thoughtful citizenship."\textsuperscript{24} Others are also crit-

\textsuperscript{23}Another, more interpretive, study, of how nationalism and a sense of nationality are transmitted in elementary schools in Mexican and U.S. border towns, touched very briefly on the Pledge of Allegiance and the Mexican flag ceremony as possible engines of such transmission. See Susan J. Rippberger and Kathleen A. Staudt, \textit{Pledging Allegiance: Learning Nationalism at the El Paso and Juarez Border} (New York: RoutledgeFalmer, 2003). The researchers asked if "reading about national symbols and promising loyalty to them inspire[s] patriotism? And does it lead to informed civic engagement?" (p. 51). They asserted that the flag salute "as proxy for civic learning, offers insights into children's early training in nationalism" (p. 55), but those insights were difficult to divine from their report. They did observe that the "advanced vocabulary and complex concepts" in the Pledge sometimes made it difficult for young students—especially bilingual students—to understand (pp. 55-56). The authors remarked inconclusively that "pledging national allegiance is commonplace in schools . . ., but how deeply this is internalized is not clear" (p. 55). They concluded that civic education on the border largely "consists of an effort to instill pride in nation, patriotism and loyalty, obedience to laws, and memorization of details and facts based on a more conservative construction of history" (p. 73). Presumably rituals like the Pledge play a role in that effort. The authors did not elaborate, however, upon what that role might be, or whether it is of any value to the civic educational process.

ical of post-9/11 Pledge mandates as "reverting to form over substance and rote memorization over democratic participation." As stated by Hyman Kavett almost 30 years ago, "There cannot be any patriotic spirit when meaningless parroting of words takes place."

Pledge opponents also strongly assert that compelling the Pledge is contrary to the messages of freedom and liberty articulated therein. They argue that those who would take freedom out of the equation by requiring students to recite the Pledge, even if it is against their personal beliefs, make a mockery out of the very First Amendment freedoms that are the cornerstone of America. This may be one of the greatest paradoxes of American freedom: by not imposing the Pledge upon others, perhaps individuals will reflect on the freedom that they have and will come to value the words on their own terms.

In other words, although the notions of "liberty" and "justice for all" highlighted by the Pledge are themselves of great value, the act of forcing students to mouth the words teaches a contradictory lesson—that of state-sponsored coercion and "the hypocrisy of the Pledge." American "students today can better use their time debating this question than marching in lockstep loyalty." For these opponents of requiring the Pledge in schools, "social criticism is the ultimate act of patriotism." Mandating the Pledge results in "silencing dissent and imposing forms of compulsory patriotism [that are] the very antithesis of freedom."

Thus, opponents of the Pledge reject both the "rote" aspect and the compulsory aspect of its daily recitation in schools as appropri-

---

26Hyman Kavett, "How Do We Stand with the Pledge of Allegiance Today?" Social Education 40 (March 1976): 136.
28Ibid.
ate for achievement of patriotic goals. Pledge supporters, on the other hand, see both compulsion and rote renderings as a plus in this circumstance. E. D. Hirsch, for example, believes that rote repetition of the Pledge does indeed produce a deeper grasp of its underlying concepts in students: "Reciting the Pledge of Allegiance every morning leads by degrees to a conceptual understanding" of the words in the Pledge.

The compulsory aspect of the Pledge ritual seems inextricably intertwined with the patriotic aims that supporters are hoping to achieve. These supporters view the Pledge as representing "a spirit of patriotism, community, and connectedness" in a time of "cultural impoverishment" and fragmentation. In a published debate between Russo and McKinney about whether the Pledge should be compelled, McKinney opined that

Everyday modern life is saturated with attacks on many traditions and norms that have historically provided us with valuable forms for social and political action. Traditional socializing institutions and their symbolic structures such as the family, the church, and community have become increasingly fragmented and less influential in transmitting values. It is imperative today that we take action and focus on the importance of reproducing our shared democratic, political and cultural life . . . [W]e must protect those traditions and cultural values, like the Pledge, that lead to a sense of collective membership and attachment in this society.

The role of the public schools in the transmission of shared values like respect for the flag and loyalty to the nation is extraordinarily important to advocates of saying the Pledge in schools. A degree of compulsion simply is part of the package: the "arguments by opponents of the Pledge, who call for a value-free and compulsion-free curriculum, are misplaced and unrealistic." The compulsory nature of the Pledge is seen as a necessary element to achieve "community, connectedness[,] . . . communication . . . [and] collective member-

---

31 Even many who support a compulsory Pledge agree that students with religious objections should be permitted to opt out. See Charles J. Russo and Joseph R. McKinney, "Resolved: As a Matter of Basic Principle, Regardless of Particular Court Interpretation, Students Should Be Free to Refuse to Pledge Allegiance to the American Flag," Curriculum Review 33 (September 1993): 7.


34 Ibid.

35 Ibid.
ship in this society" that the Pledge is supposed to represent and promote.36

The main enlightenment to be gleaned from the numerous articles on the Pledge—both pro and con—should yield a greater specificity surrounding the civic values the Pledge is asserted to affect. Both sides of the debate aspire to values of patriotism and freedom as cornerstones of citizenship. Those who oppose the mandatory Pledge in schools insist that patriotism and freedom cannot be achieved without the ability to dissent and criticize freely. They also hold that compulsory patriotic displays like the Pledge are anathema to these basic civic values. Those who support the Pledge find those values impossible to attain without the sense of shared values, loyalty, respect, and community that the collective ceremony of the Pledge is believed to reinforce and facilitate.

Some Views on the Teaching of Civic Values

A review of representative literature in the broader area of the teaching of social studies and citizenship education reveals similar themes. One of the battlegrounds in social studies teaching today appears to involve how to educate the school-age population in the United States about the values of citizenship in light of the increasing cultural diversity of and the absence of unifying features within that population today. The debate centers on whether or not citizenship education needs to be an active, discussion- and service-oriented process that embraces diversity—or if the curricular transmission of shared principles and common learnings that transcend (or perhaps ignore) the obvious differences among students might better instill in them the desired characteristics of engaged citizenship.

Engle and Ochoa-Becker both have asserted, for example, that preparation for active decision making, rather than mere "remembering" of facts, should be the prime focus of social studies education.37 To produce good citizens, teachers should ask probing questions rather than merely drill students on facts, because "democracy

36Ibid.: 8. Others see the Pledge as a beneficial jumping-off point or pedagogical opportunity to springboard into related social activist curricula and concepts to be taught. See David Bloome, Rachel Bloomekatz, and Petra Sander, "Literacy, Democracy, and the Pledge of Allegiance," Language Arts 70 (December 1993): 655-658; Maria Brountas, "Living the Promise," Teaching PreK-8 34 (August/ September 2003): 68-69.

is not well served by either blind loyalty or unthinking citizens.\textsuperscript{38} Rippberger and Staudt argue that "too much of what passes for civic education is ritualistic and irrelevant to students' current and future civic and social experiences" and hold out hope that "experiential or service learning may counteract a civic education that teaches passivity and uncritical acceptance of disconnected facts."\textsuperscript{39} Studies going back to the 1970s have found that "civic education classes characterized by the discussion of political issues were more likely to result in knowledge and interest in politics than was the rote memorization of factual material," even while recognizing that some educators "thought it risky to encourage discussion of issues that might divide the community.\textsuperscript{40}

Metzger compared what he called a "traditional socialization" or "citizenship transmission" model of social studies education—with its overriding emphasis on transmission of society's prevailing values, its downplaying of historical conflict, and its ignoring of injustices and institutional inadequacies—with the pedagogy of multiculturalism—"a more self-critical conception that fosters and cultivates the student's ability to examine ideas, events, and values from a variety of perspectives."\textsuperscript{41} Although Metzger rejected the narrowness of the "traditional socialization approach," he did emphasize the need to "teach the principles and cultivate the civic virtues that will enable students

\textsuperscript{38}Anna S. Ochoa-Becker, "Decision Making in Middle School Social Studies: An Imperative for Youth and Democracy," The Clearing House 72 (July/August 1999): 339. Ochoa-Becker believes that "the compelling reason for the existence of social studies curricula is to foster values and public practices that are consistent with democratic values (equality, freedom, due process, and respect for all people, whether they have handicaps or are attached to different religions, nations, or cultures)" (p. 338).


\textsuperscript{40}Judith Tomey-Purta, "Comparative Perspectives on Political Socialization and Civic Education," Comparative Education Review 44 (February 2000): 89. "Rote learning" or remembering, by itself, is generally viewed as a lower and less meaningful order of learning in the cognitive process than that of "transfer," involving processes of understanding, applying, analyzing, evaluating, and creating. See Richard E. Mayer, "Rote Versus Meaningful Learning," Theory into Practice 41 (Autumn 2002): 226–232.

\textsuperscript{41}Devon Metzger, "Finding Common Ground: Citizenship Education in a Pluralistic Democracy," American Secondary Education 30 (Spring 2002): 16. In a more general article about state mandates in education (James O. Lee, "State vs. Local Control of Educational Standards: Effects on Teaching," The Educational Forum 67 [Fall 2002]: 36–46), Lee notes that the "transmission model of learning, coupled with the belief that state mandates will result in students 'taking in' more knowledge and skills, continues to drive the political agenda" (p. 43), even though this is a learning model "that cognitive research has rendered bankrupt" (p. 39).
to exercise their rights and responsibilities as citizens in a pluralistic democracy" and the "importance of identifying shared ideals and principles that are capable of inspiring loyalty and commitment to a common vision for the common good." That common vision, however, must embrace diversity and multiculturalism rather than gloss over it; public education must grapple with "the challenge of learning to live with our deepest difference." Cuban also has stressed the need for educators to help generate "social capital" to build connections of trust and reciprocity among very different individuals and groups of students—recognizing their diversity and yet connecting them through cooperation and respect—in order to promote civic duties and democratic virtues prized by American society.

Other, perhaps more conservative, authors display obvious concern about cultural diversity's potential for disrupting the educational transfer of civic values to the nation's young people. Hirsch views multiculturalism in education as an "ethnic sectarianism" that can tend toward "angry separatism and mutual hostility"; instead, he urges, we should focus on the creation of a "deliberately artificial" common culture for schools, recognizing that "common learnings are necessary to a functioning democracy." Hoge perceives "mounting cultural diversity without sufficient unity as [a] threat to the welfare of our contemporary democracy" and advocates "character education" as a means to ameliorate that threat. These authors appear to view citizenship education as a bulwark against the dangers of diversity disrupting democracy, through the transmission of common learnings and values of community and shared civic culture.

Those who write about social studies and civic education clearly differ about the goals to which such education aspires. Their arguments direct consideration back to the question of whether daily recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance could be the kind of curricular element that effectively would promote the underlying citizenship values that advocates assume to be so desirable. Use of the daily Pledge as a piece of the social studies curriculum would not be attractive to those who view citizenship education as a multicultural, active, participative, non-rote process. Those who embrace

43Ibid.: 18.
more of a transmission model of civic education and who view common culture as preferable to diversity as a basis for civic engagement undoubtedly would find the shared ceremony of the Pledge particularly appealing.

The central issue becomes, then, whether or not any factual basis can be found, through quantitative or qualitative research, for the argument that the Pledge indeed contributes to the transmission of those citizenship values embraced by its proponents.

**Research Studies of Effective Citizenship Education in the Literature**

Unlike the Pledge itself, the broader realm of citizenship education has generated interesting studies that may provide some valuable insights for this examination of the Pledge. Torney-Purta reported on a massive, two-phase international study of civic education conducted under the auspices of the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA). The first phase, in 1999, studied 90,000 14-year-olds in 24 countries using qualitative case studies in order to learn about these countries' expectations of what their young people should know about citizenship. Based on what was learned in the qualitative phase, the second phase of the study developed a 38-question quantitative test to measure students' knowledge of democratic principles and their skill at interpreting materials with political or civic content, as well as survey questions "about students' schools and homes, participation in voluntary organizations, plans for civic participation as adults, and attitudes about citizenship and government, including the justice system."

The huge-scaled IEA study generated many findings, only some of which are of special interest here. For example, it found that the "focus of young people's plans for civic engagement seems to be moving toward community rather than political involvement," with more than 80 percent of U.S. students tested endorsing the importance of joining community organizations to protect human rights and the environment, but only half rating joining a political party or engaging in political discussions as important. Civic engagement in

---


50Ibid.: 47. The study also found that U.S. students who attended schools with high levels of poverty, who had few books in their homes, and who did not expect
the political system, apparently, is declining, whereas apolitical volunteerism flourishes among young people in the United States.

Other researchers have taken advantage of the IEA researchers’ work to conduct smaller-scaled, more narrowly focused studies about the importance of civic engagement to young people. Researchers from the University of Minnesota created a 22-item “citizenship engagement scale” using as measures questions from the IEA study’s test instrument. Their study used this instrument to explore whether use of “collectivistic” or “individualistic” language to characterize citizenship engagement items would alter how high school students might respond to those items. The surveys were administered to two civics and government classes at two public high schools. The two groups of students were asked to indicate their level of agreement with an identical list of 22 citizenship engagement items, with one important difference: in one class, the items were characterized as “important to good citizenship,” whereas in the other class, the items were characterized as “a duty of good citizenship.” Based upon their assumptions (supported by their literature review) that the United States is characterized more by an individualistic value orientation (with emphasis on self-reliance, independence, competition, and freedom of expression) than a collectivistic value orientation (with emphasis on interdependence, belongingness, and connectedness), the researchers hypothesized that the students would be more inclined to endorse citizenship activities if they were characterized as “important” rather than as “duties”—the latter being a more collectivistic term of moral obligation to authority or to others.

Tomey-Purta opines that “democracies are built on the assumption that all citizens possess knowledge as a key to civic power, so this gap in civic achievement among U.S. adolescents is troubling” (p. 46).

Ian Williamson, Marti H. Gonzales, Patricia G. Avery, John L. Sullivan, Eric Riedel, and Angela Bos, “Collectivist Values and Individualistic Language as Predictors of Endorsement of Citizenship Activities Among High School Students,” Theory and Research in Social Education 31 (Spring 2003): 203–217. The items covered “obligations to state and national governments (e.g., to obey the law, to be willing to serve in the military to defend the country), obligations to express oneself as a citizen (e.g., to participate in a peaceful protest against a law believed to be unjust), obligations to monitor the government and current events (e.g., to follow political issues in the newspaper, on the radio, or on television), and obligations to be tolerant (e.g., to accept people who are different)” (p. 207). Other items that seem to resonate with the words of the Pledge of Allegiance and the aims that its proponents wish to foster included “to do activities that help the community”; “to send aid to victims of disasters”; “to be patriotic and loyal to the country”; “to show respect for government representatives”; and “to respect the right of others” (pp. 209–210).
in the community, whereas the former derives more from the motives of the individual.\textsuperscript{52}

The study's results confirmed the researchers' hypothesis: "young people were willing to endorse a number of citizen activities or actions when such activities or actions were framed—via response scales—as 'important' for citizens to perform, but not as 'duties' inherent in citizenship."\textsuperscript{53} According to the authors, their study indicates that today's students may be ruled more by intrinsic motivations than extrinsic standards. The pedagogical significance of these findings, in view of the "ongoing generational decline in civic participation in America," is that teachers might be more effective using a language of importance rather than duty in trying to induce students toward civic participation and awareness.\textsuperscript{54}

Another study by some of the same authors from the University of Minnesota performed a "quantitative content analysis" of the National Standards for Civics and Government, developed by the Center for Civic Education, upon which many textbooks and other elements of the nation's high school social studies curricula are based.\textsuperscript{55} The goal of the study was to "quantify the relative emphasis placed on such individualistic or classical liberal concepts as individual rights, freedoms, and liberties, versus an emphasis placed on such collectivistic or communitarian concepts as the obligations or duties of the individual to participate meaningfully in public life."\textsuperscript{56} Their methodology involved scanning the \textit{Standards}' text into computers, dividing the text into more than 1,000 "text units," creating a list of "coding categories" (rights, obligations, participation, individualism, and collectivism), compiling a list of words corresponding to the coding categories, and then searching the text units to identify, based upon the word list, to which coding categories each unit belonged. The results showed that text units referring to citizen rights outnumbered text units referring to citizen responsibilities by nearly two to one. Moreover, individualistic and rights references were more prominent, appearing uniformly throughout the document, whereas responsibility and participation references occurred mostly at the end of the document. The \textit{Standards}, in other words, "do not appear to

\textsuperscript{52}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{53}Ibid.: 212.
\textsuperscript{54}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{56}Ibid.: 115.
be neutral in the attention paid to the concepts of individualism, collectivism, rights, responsibilities and participation.\(^57\)

These University of Minnesota studies present two areas of interest for our present purposes. First, the use of the "citizen engagement scale" or a similar instrument (using portions of an already existing instrument created as a result of the enormous IEA qualitative study and then administered in the IEA quantitative study) holds some promise for the examination of the differential impact (if any) of the Pledge of Allegiance on comparable classrooms of students that do and do not recite it.\(^58\) The "citizenship engagement scale" contains a number of items that draw on values of the sort shown by the literature to be important to Pledge proponents—items relating to community and shared values, loyalty, respect, patriotism—that could prove useful in this enterprise.

Second, the substantive conclusions of the researchers might give some pause to those who advocate daily recitation of the Pledge for pedagogical reasons. The studies purport to show that collectivistic or communitarian language and motivations have less impact on impressionable young people than do individualistic or classically liberal language and motivations. Although some of the language of the Pledge—"liberty and justice for all" and the idea of the "I" making the Pledge—could be seen as individualistic/liberal rallying cries, the notion of "allegiance" smacks of the language of obligation, and the whole ceremony of group Pledge chanting is a collectivistic enterprise. Based upon the University of Minnesota studies, one might question the propriety of compelling collective Pledge recitation as an effective teaching tool for the very individualistic young people it is hoping to affect.

Westheimer and Kahne have published several articles that report studies involving different models of the "good citizen" and the political dimensions of service learning. All three articles referenced here explore service learning programs and their role in creating


\(^{58}\)It should be noted that some high school classrooms in metropolitan Denver public schools are currently reciting the Pledge daily, whereas others are not. A study of groups of comparable students at each could be fruitful.
conditions for both the participation and critical thinking needed for democratic citizenship values to take hold among students. Two of the articles are case studies and the third is a mixed design that employed both quantitative and qualitative methods.

The third article is the product of a two-year study of service learning programs in 10 schools, two of which the article discussed in detail. All shared the goal of teaching "good citizenship" by engaging students in analysis and action on community issues. The authors posit three models or conceptions of "good citizenship": the "personally responsible citizen," centering on building individual character, charity, and compassion; the "participatory citizen," concentrating on active participation in the civic and social life of the community; and the "justice-oriented citizen," focusing on critical assessment of social, political, and economic structures and exploration of collective strategies for change. The empirical analysis in the 2002 article studied the differences between those programs emphasizing participation and those emphasizing justice.

In this study, a combination of quantitative data from pre- and post-surveys and qualitative data from observations and interviews was used. The pre-post surveys (conducted at the outset and at the end of the programs) enabled a systematic assessment of how the two programs influenced their participants in relation to a standardized set of criteria. The survey items were "selected in an effort to assess varied outcomes commonly associated with civic priorities" and were


61Ibid., pp. 4-9.

62Personal responsibility-type programs were addressed in the 1996 article, which found such programs wanting because "citizenship in a democratic community requires more than kindness and decency; it requires . . . that individuals work to create, evaluate, criticize, and change public institutions and programs." Joseph Kahne and Joel Westheimer, "In the Service of What? The Politics of Service Learning," *Phi Delta Kappan* 77 (May 1996): 598. The authors see the personal responsibility model as essentially conservative, with "a focus on loyalty or obedience [that] works against the kind of critical reflection and action many assume are essential in a democratic society." Joel Westheimer and Joseph Kahne, "What Kind of Citizen? The Politics of Educating for Democracy" (paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, New Orleans, LA, April 2002), ERIC ED468290, p. 9.

not dissimilar from the survey items used in the University of Minnesota study. The measures, either adapted from the survey instruments used by others or newly created, assessed such areas as commitment to community involvement, personal responsibility, desire to volunteer, interest in politics and community development, beliefs regarding employer and government responsibility, and commitment to structural or individual explanations of poverty. The interviews and observations, conducted with both students and teachers, enabled the researchers to probe more deeply into what participants meant by their survey responses and to explore aspects of citizenship and the ways that features of the curriculum may have affected their perspectives. They asked students what it meant to them to be good citizens; what social issues were important to them and the community; and how their participation in their program might have altered their attitudes, knowledge, or skills relating either to particular issues or to their perspectives on citizenship. Teachers were also asked about their priorities, perspectives, and strategies on civic education, and what worked and what did not. They all were asked about "critical incidents" to help the researchers better understand their perspectives and the impact of particular curricular components.

One of the two programs—clearly falling within the “participatory citizen model”—focused on active involvement in civic affairs through specific projects and on teaching and using the knowledge and skills necessary for such civic involvement. The other—just as clearly promoting the “justice-oriented citizen model”—focused more on critical analysis and social criticism. The first program engaged in micro-politics; the second discussed macro-level critiques of social problems. Analysis of the quantitative and qualitative data demonstrated that “both programs were effective at achieving goals consistent with their respective underlying conceptions of citizenship.”

The students in the first program scored higher on the post-survey than on the pre-survey on items associated with technocratic and leadership skills and commitment to participation, and the interviews and observations bore that out; the students in the second program scored higher in the post-survey on items relating to interest in or knowledge of social critiques and systematic reform, and the qualitative data supported those scores. The scores of partici-

---


66Ibid., p. 31.
pants in the participatory citizen program on items relating to social justice, however, did not rise; the scores of the justice-oriented citizen program participants on items relating to community participation, technical challenges, leadership skills, and so on, also did not go up. The researchers concluded that a commitment to participate and the capacities to do so are not necessarily coupled with an appreciation for social justice—and that engaging in critical analysis does not necessarily foster the ability or commitment to participate in civic affairs. The article recognizes that the programs aimed to achieve different goals with different political underpinnings and that each did successfully just what it set out to do.

The authors of these fascinating studies, with their emphasis on the need for critical thinking to achieve democracy and their affection for activist participation in civic affairs, probably would not think highly of recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance as an educational tool. Their methodology, however, is instructive. They used a mix of surveys, interviews, and observations to gather very rich data from which to determine whether curricular elements of a civics program successfully contributed to reaching the programs' underlying goals. This kind of triangulating design could be useful in exploring the Pledge of Allegiance's contribution to the attainment of the goals in the classroom that its supporters articulate.

**DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

The impetus behind a collective ceremony like the Pledge of Allegiance, particularly in a time of perceived crisis or instability, seems to lie in the need to bond with others and take solace in community. Legislatures in the United States want to advance this need to a more universal level and to mandate the recitation of the Pledge in public school classrooms. Their justification for such patriotic mandates against First Amendment attack is that daily recitation of the Pledge has pedagogical value. On the other hand, neither do they define what that value might be nor have they demonstrated that the Pledge actually contributes to their goals. Pledge opponents scorn the notion that the Pledge can have any educational value at all—but are equally unable to serve up research conclusions to show its lack of value.

The literature on the Pledge in particular, and social studies and citizenship education generally, sheds light on what the educational value of the Pledge might be. Supporters aspire to use the Pledge as a curricular tool to transmit shared values of community, loyalty,
respect, and patriotism in the face of increasing social diversity and fragmentation. Although opponents of the Pledge's routine saying and supporters of multiculturalism deprecate both the "rote" approach of the Pledge and the seemingly monocultural aims of its proponents, the state-sanctioned Pledge mandates are not likely to disappear. If those who oppose forcing the Pledge on children and youth wish ultimately to succeed, they must try, at least, to demonstrate the Pledge's lack of effectiveness at what it sets out to do (whether the Pledge opponents agree with that mission or not). Similarly, Pledge supporters ultimately will prevail against First Amendment challenges only if they can articulate the Pledge's pedagogical mission and show its effectiveness in fulfilling that mission.

The purpose of research along these lines would be to determine if the Pledge of Allegiance does or does not have the educational value that its proponents allege. The research question could be stated as follows: How does daily recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance in the classroom contribute to the effective transmission of shared values of loyalty, respect, community, and patriotism among high school students? (I would add to that mix the values of "liberty" and "justice for all," because the words are in the Pledge itself.) The studies on citizenship education reviewed earlier provide examples of quantitative instruments and qualitative interview and observational approaches that could be deployed to study this question. Even so, new instruments reasonably may need to be developed.

My hypothesis is that research evidence will demonstrate that the Pledge has little effect on the patriotic values of the students who repeat it. The literature on the relative pedagogical ineffectiveness of rote repetition and the studies showing the unattractiveness of collectivistic concepts to individualistic young people lead to the inference that the group rite of Pledge reciting likely has little educational impact. A combination of surveys of high school classes who say and do not say the Pledge as to their agreement or disagreement with certain key value statements, interviews of students and teachers about their Pledge of Allegiance experiences, and observations of classes saying the Pledge itself (and their level of attentiveness to the exercise) could yield insight into what that impact might be.

LAURIE J. BENNETT is a doctoral student in Curriculum and Instruction, College of Education, University of Denver, 2135 E. Wesley, Denver, CO 80210; phone: (303) 744-9231; fax: (303) 744-9307; email: ljbenn@interfold.com or labennet@du.edu.