Learning for Cosmopolitan Citizenship: theoretical debates and young people's experiences

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ABSTRACT   *Since citizenship is a contested concept, education for citizenship is also a site of debate and controversy. This article explores the limitations of education for national citizenship, and reflects on the deficit models of young people which are often presented in justifying citizenship education. Extending political theorist David Held's model of cosmopolitan democracy, the authors propose the term education for cosmopolitan citizenship. They explore the features of education for citizenship in the context of globalisation, noting that citizenship education addresses local, national, regional and global issues. Such a perspective is critical in preparing young people to live together in increasingly diverse local communities and an interdependent world. The authors report on research carried out with young people living in multicultural communities in Leicester, UK, to explore understandings of community and levels of civic engagement. They explore the multiple identities and loyalties of these young people and identify sites of learning for citizenship in homes and communities. Drawing on these findings, the article concludes that a re-conceptualised education for cosmopolitan citizenship needs to address peace, human rights, democracy and development, equipping young people to make a difference at all levels, from the local to the global.*

Introduction

Education for citizenship is one response to the political and social realities of globalisation. Global migration, both of specialised labour and of individuals and groups displaced by war, political instability or dire economic conditions, has produced cosmopolitan societies across the world. Simultaneously, political movements based on ethnic, religious and narrowly nationalist ideologies threaten democracy and challenge existing political and social structures. In this context, education in general and education for citizenship in particular, provide the mechanism for transmitting the core shared values on which just and peaceful democratic societies may be built.

Citizenship, in a legal sense, is anchored in the rights and responsibilities deriving from sovereign nation states. However, it also has broader meanings deriving from international law. Migration requires individuals and groups to develop multiple loyalties and identities. This reality calls into question the idea of citizenship as

having a unique focus of loyalty to a particular nation state. The tensions between competing views of citizenship are the site of much stimulating debate. In this article we confront some of these theoretical perspectives with the realities experienced by young people from a cosmopolitan urban area of Europe. This leads us to propose a re-conceptualisation of education for citizenship so as to build on rather than deny multiple loyalties.

Since citizenship is a contested concept, education for citizenship is potentially a site of debate and controversy. In cosmopolitan societies, namely those characterised by a high degree of cultural diversity, one crucial area for debate is how citizenship education responds to this diversity and, in particular, the extent to which it addresses the formal and informal barriers to citizenship faced by minorities. Our contribution to the debate is to propose a model of citizenship education that draws on theories of cosmopolitan democracy. This has the advantage of acknowledging local, national and global contexts and the wide variety of experiences that learners may bring to their education.

Debates about citizenship and education are not the sole purview of academics. The fact remains that young people are rarely given opportunities to contribute and yet, as important stakeholders in education and in society, young people have much to contribute to such debates and to the formulation of a relevant and effective education for citizenship. We therefore set out to explore with young people in a cosmopolitan city in England their feelings about community and how they negotiate their multiple identities and sense of belonging within multi-localities. Through analysing data from interviews and workshop activities with these young people, we identify key sites of learning for citizenship within their communities (Osler & Starkey, 2001a).

An understanding of home and community sites of learning for citizenship can inform teachers, curriculum planners and policy-makers responsible for citizenship learning in schools. We argue that this understanding is critical if we are to build effectively on learners' experiences and develop a comprehensive and sustainable programme of education for cosmopolitan citizenship.

Aims of Citizenship Education

Preparation for citizenship is a key task of all state education systems. Whether through the whole curriculum or through specialised programmes, education provides socialisation into what has been termed the 'imagined community' of the nation (Anderson, 1991). A major objective of education for national citizenship is to ensure that young people understand their present and future roles within the constitutional and legal framework of the state in which they live. They are expected to learn about and identify with the legal, political, religious, social and economic institutions of the country in which they are being educated (Torney-Purta *et al.*, 2001). In democratic states, citizens are constitutionally entitled to equal rights to participate in and to influence government. However, in practice, this formal equality is undermined by discriminatory practices and public discourses that exclude minorities or which marginalise them within the imagined community of the nation. In such discourses the nation is often portrayed as having a homogeneous cultural identity into which minorities are expected to integrate.

In this respect, education for national citizenship often fails to engage with the actual experiences of learners, who, in a globalised world are likely to have shifting

and multiple cultural identities and a sense of belonging that is not expressed first and foremost in terms of the nation (Alexander, 1996; Osler, 1997; Hall, 2000). Moreover we suggest that such education tends to prepare young people for future citizenship without acknowledging their experiences and their existing citizenship rights. Young people are frequently presented as citizens-in-waiting (Verhellen, 2000) and youth is often portrayed as threatening yet politically apathetic (Griffin, 1997; Osler & Vincent, 2003). Citizenship education programmes that build on these assumptions may, unintentionally, serve to alienate and exclude. Young people are likely to feel alienated by programmes which overlook their experiences and sites of learning for citizenship within communities. Where public discourse and discriminatory practices serve to undermine the citizenship rights of minorities, education for national citizenship may be doubly exclusionary.

Context

Current international interest in citizenship education stems from a number of political developments. First, there is the emergence of recently democratised states, such as South Africa and those of Central and Eastern Europe and Latin America. Citizenship education is essential to enable populations to understand democracy and its basis in human rights. Secondly, governments in established democracies, concerned at an apparent crisis of confidence in formal, established political processes including elections, see citizenship education as a means of restoring confidence in democracy. Thirdly, globalisation has led to increased migration and consequent demographic changes. In urban areas in particular, school populations are characterised by increased cultural diversity and by the presence of refugees and asylum seekers. Citizenship education is intended to enable young people from different backgrounds to live together.

It is the issue of civic disengagement, analysed by writers such as Putnam (2000) that most concerns governments in the longer established democracies. As a consequence, the programmes of citizenship education in England, for example, are based on a view of young people that assumes that they are apathetic because they fail to understand the political basis of the state and they are ignorant of their responsibilities and their rights (Crick, 2000). We have noted that this deficit model, which defines young people as less good citizens, may lead to compensatory programmes which are unlikely to engage them (Osler, 2000; Starkey, 2000; Osler & Starkey, 2000). We therefore propose that education for citizenship be explicitly recognised as education for cosmopolitan citizenship. We develop this notion later, but note here that it implies learning to imagine the nation as a diverse and inclusive community. This appears to be an essential pre-condition for the renewal of democracy in a globalised world.

Cosmopolitan Democracy and Learning for Citizenship

A number of political theorists argue that we need to re-think democracy in the context of our increasingly interdependent world. Held (1995, 1996) proposes a model of 'cosmopolitan democracy', challenging the notion that the nation state is the only locus for democracy and that the state alone has the power to guarantee the rights of its citizens. Processes of globalisation and increased interdependence mean that no one, wherever they live in the world, can remain completely isolated within

a single nation. All human lives are increasingly influenced by events in other parts of the world. One of the most visible manifestations of this is that local communities have become more diverse. If democracy is now conceptualised as cosmopolitan, then the actors within the democracy are, by extension, cosmopolitan citizens. We have characterised education for cosmopolitan citizenship as incorporating the local, national, regional (for example, European) and global dimensions of citizenship education (Osler & Vincent, 2002). The concept of cosmopolitan citizenship, currently the focus of considerable academic debate and discussion (see, for instance, Gilroy 1997; Hutchings & Dannreuter, 1999; Kymlicka, 2001), provides us with a theoretical construct that informs our analysis of education for citizenship.

Citizens now find themselves belonging to what Held (2001) calls 'overlapping communities of fate': local, regional, national, international and, increasingly, virtual. Even though they may have very different cultures and beliefs, their interests are tied up with others, not because they share a common national citizenship, but because they may be members of a diasporic group, have a common faith or political agenda, or live in a particular neighbourhood.

These changes provide opportunities for the development of new forms of inclusive democracy and democratic decision-making. Held argues for the building of human rights into the constitution of states and for the democratisation of continental and global institutions. The Human Rights Act 1998, which incorporates the European Convention on Human Rights into UK law, is one example of the ways in which national institutions are voluntarily subjecting themselves to international standards. The setting up of an International Criminal Court is an illustration of a new supra-national institution, created in the image of those operating at national level. As Habermas notes:

> Even if we have a long way to go before fully achieving it, the cosmopolitan condition is no longer merely a mirage. State citizenship and world citizenship form a continuum whose contours, at least, are already becoming visible. (Habermas, 1996, p. 515)

Doubts have been cast on whether changes such as these in fact constitute democratisation, given that international institutions are invariably intergovernmental and that it is un-elected non-governmental organisations (NGOs) that take the lead in trying to influence decision-making at a global level (Miller, 1999; Kymlicka, 2001). Despite these limitations and the lack of an institutional locus for the cosmopolitan citizen, the concept of cosmopolitan citizenship is helpful in so far as it recognises the existence of transnational and diasporic communities composed of individuals entitled to and aware of their human rights (Gilroy, 1997).

Defining Education for Cosmopolitan Citizenship

Drawing on UNESCO's (1995) framework, we have identified some characteristics of the educated cosmopolitan citizen (Osler & Vincent, 2002). We suggest that educated cosmopolitan citizens will be confident in their own identities and will work to achieve peace, human rights and democracy within the local community and at a global level, by:

- accepting personal responsibility and recognising the importance of civic commitment;

- working collaboratively to solve problems and achieve a just, peaceful and democratic community;
- respecting diversity between people, according to gender, ethnicity and culture;
- recognising that their own worldview is shaped by personal and societal history and by cultural tradition;
- respecting the cultural heritage and protecting the environment;
- promoting solidarity and equity at national and international levels.
  (adapted from UNESCO, 1995)

Young People and Citizenship Programmes

Young people are not usually invited to contribute to the process of formulating programmes of citizenship education and yet it is axiomatic in other areas of policy that user groups be consulted before key reforms are put in place. Young people's interests may be overlooked because they are perceived as citizens-in-waiting rather than as citizens in their own right and thus they are seen as lacking equal status with other stakeholders. Since most young people of school age are not entitled to vote in elections for local or national representatives, politicians are not directly account-able to them. It is also often assumed that as non-voters they are not involved or engaged in political processes. Consequently, little attempt is made to build on their existing political knowledge or experience and to use this as a foundation for citizenship learning in school. Disengagement from formal political parties is equated with widespread apathy, ignorance and complacency, despite evidence to suggest that many young people are finding alternative routes to political action (Roker *et al.*, 1999). It is rarely acknowledged that, among those aged 18-plus, a decision not to vote may reflect a lack of confidence in politicians or in the efficacy of formal political processes.

Young people from minority ethnic backgrounds in post-colonial societies may be even more harshly judged. They may be subject to labelling and stigmatising on the basis of appearance (Jenkins, 1996) and be considered as second class citizens. Assumptions may concern nationality, residence status, language skills, capacity to operate effectively in society, religious affiliations and the compatibility of religious beliefs with social norms as defined by the majority community. Visible minorities are exposed to 'everyday racism' (Essed, 1991) and 'street racism' (Parekh, 2000). When those working in the police and in other public sector services make assumptions about members of ethnic minority groups on the basis of name or appearance (Banton, 1997, p. 16), this amounts to 'institutional racism' (Macpher-son, 1999). Research from Canada confirms the findings of earlier ethnographic studies in English schools (for example, Wright, 1986, 1992) that teachers are not immune from such discriminatory judgements:

> [In the school being studied] skin colour and its related physical traits serve perhaps more than any other characteristics to mark students. … Teachers often adjust their expectations of students on the basis of the latter's physical appearance. (Ryan, 1999, p. 86)

As a consequence, and as we have previously demonstrated, those responsible for developing programmes of education for citizenship assume that young people from ethnic minorities require extra instruction in national citizenship and even special programmes not required by the majority (Osler, 2000; Osler & Starkey, 2001b).

They fail to appreciate that these young people are likely to bring considerable insights to their citizenship learning.

The Research Project

We set out to explore with young people living in Leicester, a multicultural city in England, their sites of learning for citizenship. In particular we wished to gain insights into the opportunities they have to experience rules, rights, responsibilities and institutions. We recognise that:

> People learn to be responsible citizens not only in schools, but in the family, neighbourhood, churches and many other groups and forums in civil society. (Kymlicka, 2001, p. 293)

The research project involved some 600 young people aged 10–18, from four schools in the city, who responded to a questionnaire. We also collected further data from volunteers who took part in two workshops we ran at each school. Here we draw on data from students in Year 9 (aged 13–14 years) attending school in two contrasting inner-city areas. Ours was an opportunity sample, but the demographic composition of the schools is in many ways typical of inner-city schools in Europe. For instance, in school A the vast majority of the students (87.3%) described themselves as Indian, around 5% from other Asian backgrounds, 4% as White and 3.5% as being of mixed descent. The school has a relatively stable pupil population. More than 80% of our sample had lived in Leicester for 12 years or more, that is, for all or most of their lives. Many of the parents of these students were formerly students at the same school, and for many families this is the third generation living in Leicester, their grandparents having migrated to Britain from East Africa during the late 1960s and 1970s.

By contrast, school B has a very mobile school population, 77.8% of our sample had lived in Leicester for 4 years or less. Around one third had lived in the city for less than 2 years and had therefore joined the school since Year 7. A significant proportion of these had arrived in Britain from overseas, many of them as refugees and asylum seekers. There was greater ethnic diversity within the school population with 60% of the students describing themselves as Indian, 11% as Pakistani, 6.7% as Bangladeshi and 4.3% as from other Asian backgrounds. Some 4% described their heritage as African, 3% as Caribbean and around 3% as White. A further 3.6% described themselves as being of mixed descent. The self-descriptors of these students indicate considerable heterogeneity within each of these broad groupings.

At school A all those participating in workshops were members of the school council who volunteered to participate in the project. They had therefore worked together before and knew each other quite well. In school B workshop participants were selected and invited to participate by senior teachers. We asked for a group who would be at ease working with two 'unknown' adults. The young people were representative of the wider school population, in that they were drawn from a variety of religious and ethnic backgrounds, with some relatively new to the school. They did not all know each other well, although each student knew at least one other, being from the same tutor group.

Young People's Identities and Community

Seven of the eight students taking part in the workshops at the more settled school A, mentioned Leicester when writing about where they came from. Only two out of the seven students at school B mentioned Leicester. All but two of the total sample identify with other places as well as Leicester, even when it is the only place they have lived. For example, Ranjit, said he was: 'born and bred in Leicester. Parents from India and Africa'.

Abdul had recently returned to Leicester after his family fled from Malawi. He had lived in the city for less than a year, after growing up in East Africa:

> I am from Malawi and I was born in Leicester in the General Hospital. My father and mother are from Malawi and my grandmother is from India. We left Malawi because almost every day people were getting shot in their houses and one of them was my neighbour. (Abdul)

Changes in family circumstances, particularly parental separations, often meant a change of home:

> I was born in Dominica (the Caribbean) but I came to England when I was only three. First I lived in Highfields with my mum and dad, then they split up and I lived with my dad in Beaumont Leys. (Thabo)

> I was born in Manchester and [lived there] until I was six months old. I moved from Manchester because my mum and dad had a divorce. My mum, dad and granddad are from Africa and my grandma is from India. (Asha)

Many of the young people had strong affective ties with other countries and places. This was true whether they had lived most of their lives in Britain or were relatively new arrivals. International travel and visits to family overseas were often mentioned as particularly significant events in their lives.

> I was born in England. I grew up with my parents. The place I lived in [in Pakistan] was a very nice place, it was very quiet and the neighbours we had were really kind and friendly. What I liked most is the sun always used to shine and how it was really hot. (Rehana)

> I was born in Keighley in West Yorkshire. I lived there for nine years and moved to Leicester when I was in Year 5. My parents are both from Bangladesh and I visited Bangladesh in 1995 and moved to Leicester in 1996. (Najma)

These young people already identify with a range of places, beyond Leicester and the UK, giving them the potential to see themselves and to develop as cosmopolitan citizens.

Self Definitions

The students were invited to write about how they defined themselves in terms of ethnicity, culture, colour or race. A number stressed their bilingualism. Many chose to explain their values, sometimes drawing on religious beliefs. Some chose to explain that theirs was an interfaith family. For example, after her parents' divorce,

Asha continued to live with her mother, a Sikh, but she herself was brought up a Hindu. Asha identified with her religion, but was not uncritical, emphasising her opposition to the caste system. For many, religion was an identifier, even when they professed to be 'not very religious':

> I am Hindu, born in Leicester and proud of being a Hindu. (Wayne)

> I believe in God. I am a Hindu, my language is Gujarati and I like my religion. I HATE people who are RACIST! I don't have a problem with people who have a different culture than me, I mix with other religions. I am a very strong believer in God. (Nadeera)

> I'm Asian and my religion is Islam. I live in a multicultural area with Christians, Sikhs, Muslims and Hindus. (Najma)

> I am Methodist. Don't really believe in God. (Ayleen)

Some chose to identify themselves without reference to religion, or by stressing they drew inspiration from a number of religions, but these were a minority. Rehana, for instance, refers to language and to the country of origin of her parents, but omits any reference to religion:

> My parents and my grandparents are both from Bangladesh. And we speak Bengali. I have been to Bangladesh and it is a nice place with a beautiful countryside. (Rehana)

Concepts of Community

When asked in the questionnaire to name the main communities in Leicester, only a very few students from either school (about 3%) named a geographical location such as their neighbourhood. Although a third of the students failed to respond to the question, perhaps implying that they were unclear of a meaning for the word 'community', over half the students responded unequivocally by naming religious or ethnic groups.

In the workshops, students were invited to create an exhibition of photographs illustrating themselves in their communities and to write descriptive captions. Their pictures were largely of friends, family, home and their neighbourhood. Although many lived within a few minutes walk of the city centre, only a few students chose to take photos there. The captions reveal much about their sense of community and belonging.

Rehana, for instance, sees community in terms of what she sees from her house and in her street. This includes the public facility of a park and two places of worship. This is a community in which she feels at ease, where she recognises people to be friendly. She gets a sense of occasion from crowds attending religious services:

> This is St Peter's Church. I see lots of people go. I see weddings, funerals.

> This is the big mosque in St Peter's. Lots of people go there every Friday to pray. The mosque is just behind my house. When it's a big day, I always go up in the attic to see people and I get a very good view.

> I quite like my community where I live because I get a good view of everything. I have very good neighbours—they are very friendly. At the

> bottom of my street I have a small park and pond. Old people go there for a walk, it's a small pond. In the summer little kids go there to play. (Rehana)

Morgan, too, feels at ease in the cosmopolitan neighbourhood where he lives. He is proud of the cultural diversity he experiences, and he identifies with his place of worship as providing a focus to his week and a sense of historical continuity. The other key institution in his neighbourhood is the community centre which he associates with leisure and relaxation:

> My church is a very important place for me. I am not very religious but I love going to pray every Sunday. It's a really old building and on its other side there is our community centre. At my community centre is where people go and relax and chill. At the same centre there are clubs, karate, drama, etc. I do karate at this centre and it is good fun.

> My street is called G. It's in Highfields, there are many people living there, people of many cultures, religion and race. I like my street people and these many cultures which are fascinating and you can learn more in life with many cultures surrounding you. (Morgan)

Many of the young people had been involved in campaigns to save a local school and had been engaged in fundraising efforts for earthquake victims in Gujerat. They were clear about how they would improve their city: in general they were concerned about other neighbourhoods which were perceived to be dangerous because of 'bullies' and 'racists'. They wanted more cinemas, fewer racists and fewer gangsters, whom they explained spoiled their own neighbourhoods, smoking drugs and hanging about in groups, extorting money and ruining parks.

In general they had considerable sensitivity to injustice, although they were more likely to understand how to respond politically to local issues, than to injustices or inequalities in other parts of the world. The major response was to give charitably, and schools tended to support this approach. In the school with the relatively stable population there was significant hostility to refugees and asylum seekers, although some young people were aware that their own grandparents had arrived in Leicester as refugees and some were willing to defend the rights of current refugees and asylum seekers. There was an open approach to discussion on this issue and a willingness to engage in dialogue.

Sites of Citizenship

As well as demonstrating strong affective ties, either to their immediate locality or to the city of Leicester, these young people identified a number of facilities within the city which they valued. These included public spaces such as parks, schools, shopping centres, community centres and libraries. They provided examples of experiences, such as visits to hospitals, housing and social security offices, and dealings with police and immigration officers, which enabled them to gain an understanding of services and procedures. These young people were often supporting and sometimes interpreting for an adult; on these occasions they were often required to present a case or act as an advocate. Individuals were gaining and practising skills for citizenship and these examples, together with others where young people gave

informal help to neighbours and family members illustrate sites of learning for citizenship in homes and community.

Conclusions

As we have argued, citizenship requires a sense of belonging (Osler & Starkey, 1996). To neglect the personal and cultural aspects of citizenship is to ignore the issue of belonging. Cosmopolitan citizens have learnt to be confident in their own identities and schools can usefully provide learning opportunities to explore and develop these. Evidence from these young people suggests that they are engaging as citizens and learning the skills for cosmopolitan citizenship within their homes and communities.

The majority of young people we worked with identified strongly with their city and/or their local neighbourhood. Cosmopolitan citizenship does not mean asking individuals to reject their national citizenship or to accord it a lower status. Education for cosmopolitan citizenship is about enabling learners to make connections between their immediate contexts and the national and global contexts. It is not an add-on but rather it encompasses citizenship learning as a whole. It implies a broader understanding of national identity. It also requires recognition that British identity, for example, may be experienced differently by different people.

Cosmopolitan citizenship implies recognition of our common humanity and a sense of solidarity with others. It is insufficient, however, to feel and express a sense of solidarity with others elsewhere if we cannot establish a sense of solidarity with others in our own communities, especially those others whom we perceive to be different from ourselves. The challenge is to accept shared responsibility for our common future and for solving our common problems. It implies dialogue and peer collaboration to address differences of opinion, as illustrated in the example of young people's discussion about the position of asylum seekers.

The young people in our research demonstrated multiple and dynamic identities, embracing local, national and international perspectives. An education for national citizenship is unlikely to provide a sufficiently comprehensive context for them to integrate their own experiences and identities.

We suggest that citizenship education requires re-conceptualising in the context of globalisation. Our research suggests that education for cosmopolitan citizenship will enable all young people to perceive themselves as citizens with rights and responsibilities. It is not a process that can be realised exclusively at school. Learning is taking place beyond the school and the school needs to build on this learning and to encourage learners to make connections between their experiences and learning in the school and in the community. This implies that teachers need to be aware of sites of citizenship learning beyond the school.

We have argued that education for cosmopolitan citizenship addresses peace, human rights, democracy and development. It is about equipping young people with the knowledge, skills and attitudes to enable them to make a difference. It is orientated towards the future, preparing young citizens to play an active role in shaping the world, at all levels, from the local to the global. The processes of globalisation make this a critical task.

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