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What type of democratic citizenship education? What type of democratic citizen?

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Abstract

Education for citizenship remains a high priority throughout much of the world. Whilst Education for Citizenship has primarily been developed for schools, most countries recognize its significance in post-compulsory education. However, in higher education, there can be a tendency for the aims to be less explicit than in schools. This raises questions as to the role of higher education in the on-going development of democratic citizenship.

Education for Citizenship courses are prevalent in Teacher Education Institutions, primarily because of the ongoing developments in schools. However, many other faculties and departments also recognize the importance of components of Education for Citizenship relating higher education learning to the significant issues of the contemporary world, such as service learning and activities in the wider community, alongside active, problem-based, interdisciplinary learning in the tutorial rooms.

Whilst there is some research that suggests very good practice, there is a variance across countries and indeed within countries as to both theory and practice. In particular, 'global citizenship' becomes a phrase used to enhance international recruitment without any real democratic content, which is particularly problematic in a neoliberal, consumerist agenda. This paper raises the key arguments for global democratic citizenship in higher education and critically examines university management commitment to democratic citizenship as understood by university academics committed to citizenship education.

Keywords

Citizenship; higher education; values; active learning; democracy.

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Introduction

The key questions surrounding education for citizenship in higher education – what is education for?; what are universities for?; and what values should education systems aim to develop in young people? – raise complex issues. As these are such challenging questions and as there is so little agreement about them, this raises as many issues for the public, students, academics and educationists, as it provides definitive answers (Arthur and Bolin, 2005; Englund, 2002; GUNI, 2008); indeed, Englund's article is subtitled 'the democratic potential of the university?' Nearly all of us who chose education as a career did so to make a difference; not just to degree results, but to the lives and aspirations of young people and society as a whole. Thus, although we champion the development of critical abilities, the skills of enquiry and questioning, activity based approaches to learning and the notion of rights as something to be cherished, this is not in itself merely a chronicle. It is to suggest that a mixture of creative content, ethos and a participatory, consultative, democratic approach in the framework of macro and micro improvements can lead to better, deeper learning and crucially a fairer and more just society.

This trend towards a larger role for education for citizenship has been global. This is shown, for example, by annual calls from the European Ministers of Education at their standing conference for a more coherent and sustained approach to education for democratic citizenship, and the emphasis on it in the Action Plan adopted by the heads of state and Government of the Council of Europe at their 3rd summit in Warsaw in May 2005. This itself reaffirmed the Council's decision that 2005 was the 'Year of Citizenship Through Education' (Council of Europe 2006). Further, in central and eastern Europe, the ending of one-party rule and movements towards democracy put the

issue of education for democracy to the fore. The content analyses of different research literature and educational policy documents (regulations, standards, programs) in Eastern Europe suggests that in most cases the curriculum for citizenship education is didactic based (Zaleskiene, 2004), attempting to allow the citizen to be seen as a person (with values, needs, rights and duties), a creator (making decisions and feeling responsible for those decisions) and a participant (having certain abilities, skills and knowledge). However, as she points out, this curriculum has not had great success.

Researchers (Fulan 1998; Jarvis 2001; Ozmon and Craver 2007) analysing a changing global world point out features of postmodernity such as social, cultural, economic and political relationships, which have a major impact on how we both view and shape our world. A person living in such a complex society has to be enabled to manage his or her life. Education for citizenship can play an important role in such circumstances, especially when democracy is seen as both a form of government and as a practice, in which participation and involvement are key points. Role, status and content of citizenship education is influenced not only by socio-educational changes, but it becomes one of the most important factors in enabling young people to face the challenges of globalisation.

Although democracy is a concept in continuous development and a topic for discussion without definitive answers, there is a broad recognition of the centrality of democracy's contribution to learning to live together. In the project 'Education for Democratic Citizenship' the Council of Europe describes democracy as an '*ability of solving conflicts and differences of opinion in a non-violent manner*'. Nonetheless, practice on the local level can end up more closely resembling old socio-cultural traditions than this conception of democracy, as many conflicts around the world end up in confrontation

and violence. Active citizenship is a more democratic practice, to a large extent culturally and politically based. The Dakar Framework for Action maintains that *'...education must lead to the acquisition of...the knowledge, values and abilities that are needed for individual development, and for the exercise of participatory and responsible citizenship in a democracy'*. Much contemporary thinking suggests that an active citizen should have a certain type of competencies which help to manage social life, such as the ability to vote and assume one's responsibilities in a democratic political system and in community life, the ability to start family life, to manage resources, to find one's way around in the educational system, to defend one's rights and interests, and to make use of legal procedures.

However, in the real world, issues become sharpened by traditional and social media and citizens decide on occasions to act by putting pressure on their representatives. For example, in the summer of 2015, some shocking images of refugees and their treatment sparked activism. In terms of our students and of citizenship learning, it is a matter of highlighting human rights as a crucial part of citizenship education and seeing citizenship education as an area of the curriculum that views the development of knowledge, critical skills and values, as well as activism, as key aspects of the democratic citizen. This programme can thus provide a suitable context for learning in many key areas such as human rights, the need for mutual respect, tolerance, understanding, and support for a diverse and multi-cultural, multi-ethnic society.

On an international level, almost all sections of society currently accept citizenship as a legitimate goal. This is not to suggest that there is much agreement as to what it means, other than that it is a 'good thing'. The debate tends to focus on maximal and minimal interpretations of citizenship. Evans, writing two decades ago (1995, p.16) summarises

these concepts as: *Minimal interpretations emphasise civil and legal status, rights and responsibilities…The good citizen is law-abiding, public-spirited, exercises political involvement through voting for representatives…Maximal interpretations, by contrast, entail consciousness of self as a member of a shared democratic culture, emphasise participatory approaches to political involvement and consider ways in which social disadvantage undermine citizenship by denying people full participation in society in any significant sense.*

Faulks (1998, 2000) identifies three main types of definitions of citizenship: legal, philosophical, and socio-political. Legal definitions of citizenship (Oliver and Heater, 1994) stress nationality, rights of residence and duties. Philosophical definitions are determined as those referencing the relationship between the role of the state in providing for needs and the duties of the individual to the state. It has been argued (Deuchar 2007; Faulks 1998, 2000; Gardner 1994; Guarnizo 2012; Heater 1999; Maitles 2005; Turner 1993) that this definition misses out the central issue of the modern world, that of social inequalities, exacerbated in recent times by neoliberal policies – discussed below. The third interpretation, socio-political, is defined by Turner (1993, 2) as *'that set of practices (juridical, political, economic and cultural) which define a person as a competent member of society, and which as a consequence shape the flow of resources to persons and social groups'*. Drawing on this theme, Hatem (2012) draws out similarities of citizenship through mass protest in comparing the Occupy movements in the 'North' and the Arab Spring in the 'South'. These mass involvements of millions of people, many of them students and youths, have led us to a greater awareness of the role of citizens.

All definitions tend to stress the nature of the relationship between the individual and the state. Yet, it would be fair to say that although discussed by policy makers, these debates rarely impinge on the way the discussions are framed in educational establishments. This is at least partly due to the impact of worldwide neoliberalism. In 2007, the Marxist geographer David Harvey published this broad-brushed picture of it (2007: 23): *"there has everywhere been an emphatic turn, ostensibly led by the Thatcher/Reagan revolutions in Britain and the United States, in political-economic practices and thinking since the 1970s. State after state, from the new ones that emerged from the collapse of the Soviet Union to old-style social democracies and welfare states such as New Zealand and Sweden, have embraced, sometimes voluntarily and sometimes in response to coercive pressures, some version of neoliberal theory and adjusted at least some of their policies and practices accordingly"*.

This of course has had a major impact on higher education, with its renewed emphasis on league tables, students as 'customers', global citizenship as a euphemism for increased numbers of international (fee paying) students, target setting and so on (Goodnight et al, 2015).   Stefan Colini (2012) outlines the market and business orientation of our universities as a process which stifles creativity and reduces all endeavours to a market orientated, finance and business model of what he calls *'HiEdBiz plc, with the motto world class products at rock bottom prices'*. In this model, statistics and management tools are key; analytics, performativity, and targets (sometimes ridiculous, seemingly modelled on the 4 year plans of totalitarian governments) become the key performance of success – and some thrive and others don't. In British universities, this has led to a decline in any sense of democratic participation by staff. As an example, when I started my university career at Strathclyde

University in Glasgow in 1996, there was an election in the Faculty for Dean; there were 2 candidates, hustings, manifestos, debate and a high turnout. I had been a high school teacher for 18 years and had experienced nothing like it. The governance of the university at that time meant that the Principal was appointed, the Depute was elected, the vice-Principals appointed and the Deans and Heads of Departments elected. It was explained to me as a check and balance of power. This was common across British universities. In 2015 this model is completely unused; now, the mantra is one of corporate identity and a business model of appointments. On occasions Principals will refer to themselves as Chief Executives of the university plc. and support the position that appointees (not elected, of course) must share the corporate vision. Connel (2013: n.p.) commenting on this worldwide trend in Australian universities outlines that *this opened a space, in new conditions, for growth in managerial power, with Vice-Chancellors and Deans increasingly understood as entrepreneurs, being paid like corporate managers, and – together with their officers – actually having more autonomy. The price is greater social distance, and often distrust, between university managers and academic staff. Corporate techniques of personnel management along fractal lines (performance management, auditing regimes) have been introduced.*

While citizenship education has primarily been developed for schools, most countries officially recognise its importance post-16 (Arthur and Bohlin 2004; Janoski 1998; Lister and Pia 2008; McDonough and Feinberg 2005; Maitles, 2013). Clearly higher education has an important role to part to play in the development of citizenship education and this relates to its longstanding role as a civilising force within complex industrial societies. The expansion of higher education raises questions about how this role is to be carried forward in the twenty first century. The incorporation of the

business and consumerist model into higher education, outlined above, has reinforced the notion that civil relationships are primarily contractual. In such an environment, how can graduates be prepared for citizenship and, potentially, a leadership role in civil society? One way this can be achieved is through the establishment of academic programmes that also incorporate forms of community based learning, an international trend that highlighted the importance of work in community and voluntary organisations for undergraduate students (Annette 2000 and 2005; Chen 2007; NCIHE 1997; Long 2001; Mattson et al 1997;). Many higher education institutions around the world now offer their students opportunities to become involved in various kinds of community, service learning and voluntary work. However, if such initiatives are to become part of a broad-based citizenship education within higher education, they must help to cultivate skills of critical thinking and social and political analysis. In this sense, citizenship education is a combination of academic skills and actual experience gained through active citizenship. Reflecting these developments in citizenship education, a key objective should be for students to explore the contested meaning of citizenship and citizenship education. In developing this critical approach to citizenship education, students should be able to evaluate and assess the application of different concepts of citizenship, a practice some teaching programmes are already encouraging (CSSGJ, 2007; Wyman, 2005). Nonetheless, as Annette (2005) points out, there is a fundamental lack of rhetoric about the values of civic republicanism and the promotion of citizenship from most of the statements of many of the higher education institutions throughout Europe.

Citizenship education and competencies

But can any of this be measured? And, if it can, would we want to? Whilst there may be some justification in developing a competency model, there are problematic areas related to the overly prescriptive form it can take. Indeed, the building of an efficient economic and political system ought never to be an end in itself but only the means to such goals as building a fair, democratic and culturally enriching society. Thus, an equally important premise must be that programmes of education for citizenship are central in preparing people for life as fair minded and competent citizens. Citizenship is therefore not something to be segregated into discrete programmes, but should permeate many types of study − literature, history, geography, politics, science, religion. The student who learns how to debate the meaning of a poem or a novel or a film or to weigh the evidence for and against wind farms or genetic modification, or to understand the reasons why Islam and Christianity have sometimes been in conflict, is in fact well prepared for life as a citizen.

At the moment, it is hard to know whether and to what extent existing programmes of higher education are any kind of common basis for citizenship at all (Arthur and Bolin, 2005; Englund, 2002; Ong, 2007). Indeed, there seems to be a tendency within the universities to the opposite, with an increasingly narrow vocational focus (Callinicos, 2006; Colini, 2012; Grubb and Lazerson, 2005; Hyland 2001; Symes and McIntyre, 2000). The need for students to get a job on leaving has always been present. The lack of grants and the tuition fees paid by most of our students accentuate these pressures. Nonetheless, the idea that our university experience should be solely about finding a job should rightly be regarded as inappropriate.

Democracy and rights

Inside the educational establishment, there is the thorny issue of whether one only learns about democracy or also lives it. If we take the 'living' model, then there are implications for our universities and indeed for society as a whole. For universities, it means there should be proper forums for discussion, consultation and decision-making involving students and it should be noted that articles of the United Nations Convention on Human Rights insist that young people should be consulted on issues that affect them and does insist on functioning democratic processes. Finally, in terms of rights, the whole issue of social inequalities and their impact on the educational attainment and aspiration of students must be taken into account.

However, there is a worry, indeed a panic, in most representative democracies around the world that young people are apathetic, alienated and uninterested in politics. Yet, there is also evidence that although young people are alienated from formal politics, they are active and interested in single issue, environmental, political and animal welfare issues. Indeed, where there is a belief that the activism – even if only voting – can make a difference, turnout amongst young people can be very high, as evidenced in the Scottish referendum on independence in September 2014.

Winning hearts and minds

Research into the attitudes of student teachers in the UK suggests that education for citizenship needs to permeate the curriculum in faculties of education. We should note that if, as the evidence suggests (Wilkins 1999 and 2001; Robbins 2003), there is

limited citizenship understanding amongst student teachers, it is fair to extrapolate that outside faculties of education these citizenship values will be at least as weak.

This research has implications for our tertiary education institutions and indeed for defining the set of competences that we should be developing. Whilst education for citizenship is now a part of this, there is no evidence that it plays more than a relatively cursory role, with many students able to avoid deep discussion or thought on the subject. Similar to the school audits, it is possible for the university faculties to develop policies which look good on paper but do not make a significant impact in practice. Education for citizenship must permeate the curriculum of university education and be developed enthusiastically by tutors.

There is, however, much to be positive about. We need to do more research into the effectiveness of learning in the three areas of citizenship: political literacy, involvement in one's community and values. However, it is also clear that we have to keep some kind of realistic perspective on the influence of education for citizenship or any kind of other civic or political education. There was widespread political education at the content level in the communist bloc and that did not prevent a large number of citizens opposing the dictatorships. Equally, there has been a return, albeit limited, in terms of influence of the old communist parties, sometimes under a new name, in parts of central and eastern Europe. As Colin Power, Assistant Director-General for Education UNESCO, (Power 1995, 7-8) noted: *'as history has often shown, knowledge about human rights is insufficient to guarantee their observance in practice'*. Teaching democratic values will not be a panacea where governments 'let down' the aspirations of their populations. However, even within this perspective there is clearly value in the population being politically literate. Indeed, the lessons of the 20th Century, in particular

that of genocide, suggest that this headteacher in the United States, who is a Holocaust survivor, sums up a strand of the case for education for citizenship (Ginott 1972, 317): *I am a survivor of a concentration camp. My eyes saw what no man should witness. Gas chambers built by learned engineers. Children poisoned by educated physicians. Infants killed by trained nurses. Women and babies shot and burned by high school and college graduates. So, I am suspicious of education. My request is: help your students become more human. Your efforts must never produce learned monsters, skilled psychopaths, educated Eichmanns. Reading, writing, arithmetic are important only if they serve to make our children more humane.*

Education for citizenship presents the central questions of what sort of education we want. That is why the continuing high profile of debate around the subject is so important and valuable. We could come out of it with not just a better understanding of citizenship but also a better feel for education as a whole.

Case study

Maitles et al (2010) researched two main questions: firstly, to what extent and in what manner university managements support citizenship education; secondly, to ascertain examples of good practice and helpful conditions. Using colleagues from over 100 European universities involved in Children's Identity and Citizenship in Europe (CiCe) – an EU funded network researching and teaching in the area of education for citizenship – in order to get a feel for both content and democratic practice within their institutions; we received a 30% return (n=64). The majority of our respondents (62%) were in Teacher Education departments, a further 23% in Social and Human Sciences

and the remainder in administration or natural science departments. We specifically investigated two broad areas: firstly, the supportiveness of higher education institutions to citizenship education, and secondly, good practices and conditions for developing citizenship education within higher education institutions. It is necessary to state that we must be wary of over-generalising from our 20% return, both as evidence of CiCe members or Higher Education as a whole across Europe, but we did find some trends which are of interest regarding citizenship education in Higher Education.

This highlighted for us the barriers and good practice evident across Europe, in universities where there was at least some commitment to citizenship through their membership and involvement in CiCe. We also devised and implemented 3 case studies – Greece, Lithuania and Scotland – through our knowledge was augmented with some structured interviews with key university personnel. These case studies are examined comparatively to determine differences and similarities across the countries.

Whilst there were clear differences in terms of history, culture and practice across the countries examined, there were some clear similarities, or at least tendencies, in practice. Firstly, a lack of resources meaning large class sizes, favouring a didactic approach, which mitigated against active learning experiences. Secondly, we observed a stubborn traditional view of academic teaching involving an authoritarian approach to learning. Thirdly, there was a lack of an understanding, particularly in Lithuania and Greece, of the pedagogy of student-centred learning. Fourthly, the Higher Education systems tend to be assessment orientated, mitigating against Citizenship initiatives and sometimes active learning. Finally, all countries had introduced formal procedures for some student involvement, but on occasion they appeared to be tokenistic – students had a voice but lacked agency.

Regarding institutional support for citizenship education, we identified a relationship between the support to a citizenship education policy and the current political framework within the countries. Essentially, those political parties close to a conservative ideology tend not to develop explicit support and initiatives towards the implementation of broad citizenship education. There was also a perceived contradiction between managerial level support for citizenship education in theory and barriers for its practical implementation. Furthermore, according to our respondents, the larger the higher education institution is, the more the institutional managers pay only lip service to citizenship education. Finally, we also found regional variations: respondents from Scandinavia and the UK suggested that the environment here is supportive; those from central Europe, less so.

In terms of identifying examples of good practice and helpful conditions, most of the answers showed that respondents consider that good practices are related to methodology as well as content; that "how" students learn is more important than "what" teachers teach. We did find a surprising regional variation to this, though; most of respondents coming from Mediterranean countries consider that best practices are more closely related to content as opposed to methodology. Further, our data shows that respondents think that a new profile of university teacher – one who is wedded to active learning in the broadest sense – is needed. A number of respondents commented on this, in terms of university recruitment requirements, initial commitments and basic competences in the field of tuition in general and in citizenship education as a specific topic. It was considered to be of little use in the development of programmes of implementation when academic culture only promotes rigid lectures and written examinations as the major elements of university activity. Furthermore, democratisation

of academic culture is a requirement to fulfil faculties of good practices in citizenship education. Respondents believe that good practices are based in a cross-curricular approach, instead of segregated courses. This point is extremely relevant as it stresses the need for cross-curricular strategies and networking within the higher education institutions.

Our data shows that citizenship education, wherever it is introduced, is primarily optional. This suggests certain characteristics of the status and role of citizenship education in the framework of university curricula: low, emerging, new.

Clearly in accordance to the statement that pointed out the need for a new teacher profile, respondents who focused their answers on methodology consider that good practice regarding citizenship education within higher education institutions should be based on methodologies such as:

- Experiential, learning by doing

- Student-centred learning as opposed to the teacher-centred didactic approach –

- Participatory environment, co-operative learning

Conclusions

This was a small-scale study of Education for Citizenship, and the developments examined and discussed herein may have been influenced by specific contextual socio-historic conditions. Thus, while it is important that we not to not take too much from

this study, there are nonetheless a series of positives and some barriers which bear examination.

In general, we found a commitment by governments, university bodies such as courts and Senates, and in most cases members of staff to an education for citizenship agenda in Higher Education. Linked to this, there is an understanding from many of the students of education for citizenship, stemming from both their current experience in Higher Education and their prior learning and experiences in primary and secondary education. In some cases, our respondents reported on student experiences of being involved in and consulted on the running of universities. In many cases, they reported genuine consultation within departments and courses, with students having a say in how their learning occurs, regarding student centred, problem based learning at its core. Some members of staff, active in some programmes, in certain departments and select universities stress democracy and rights and values at their core.

Nonetheless, we also found some significant barriers to meaningful education for citizenship in the universities examined. Firstly, an increasingly market orientated neo-liberal agenda which, at its worst, treats universities as competing entities based on league tables. Secondly, a 'downgrading' of teaching, often related to a management led research enhancement agenda, resulting in larger sections mitigating against student-centred learning. This can also be exacerbated be a lack of problem-based learning expertise on the part of some university staff. Thirdly, in some cases, the student involvement was largely formalistic and tokenistic. The universities, departments and courses in question had structures in place but in reality, gave no real say to the student body as a whole. Finally, universities were increasingly vocationally oriented, a position often supported by student bodies encouraging a narrower agenda.

In reality the emphasis on positives and barriers depends on whether one sees the glass as half full or half empty. Our investigation has suggested that there is excellent work going on in the development of young people's interest, knowledge, skills and dispositions in the areas of citizenship and democracy; yet it is very limited, indeed rare, to find examples of genuine democracy based on human rights. It is a matter of hearts and minds. No amount of hectoring and/or government instructions can counter this; academics must have a sense of mission and to grasp the fullness of moral and social aims. Field research must now concentrate on the impact of education for citizenship initiatives and look towards highlighting instances of good and effective practice.

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