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Cultivating citizenship awareness: the school setting

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The basis for just relationships, just communities, and a just world is self-respect and respect for others. We must be seriously concerned about nurturing and cultivating respect between humans, especially in children, within and among communities around the world in the struggle for human rights and justice. For me, this is the core of citizenship education.

Teachers in schools have a key role in promoting citizenship awareness amongst students. This paper presents preliminary findings of a study that indicates that the way in which teachers construct the meaning of citizenship education, reflected in their aims and teaching strategies, is essential for effective and responsible teaching.

Aims of school programmes on citizenship education

Many institutions around the world have started programmes in schools which have the general aim of promoting respect for others and citizenship awareness. These programmes have various titles, such as Character Education, Education for Citizenship and the Teaching of Democracy. Some of these programmes focus on moral and social competence and skills, some on community involvement, and others on political activity (Holden, 1999; Yates and Youniss, 1999). These programs are interdisciplinary, crossing various traditional curriculum boundaries to include, among other subjects, ethics, religious studies, history, social studies, and literature, and they focus on values.

While these programs may have their specific aims articulated in different ways, they share a major aim of promoting students' citizenship awareness and their social and moral growth by fostering their autonomy and intimacy. We provide students with opportunities to develop their autonomy, as reflected in the freedom to raise different points of view and the encouragement of autonomous and critical thinking, and as reflected in the acceptance of mutual rights and duties. These programs also provide students with opportunities to develop their ability for intimacy, as reflected in care for each other and their concern for trust and truthfulness, goodness and generosity.

Teachers' professional competence and students' citizenship awareness

Surprisingly few studies have explored the effects of the various citizenship programs on students' progress in citizenship awareness. Even fewer have focused on teachers' professional assessment of the importance of working on citizenship issues in schools in their practice. However, as teachers have a key role in organising constructive and meaningful experiences for their students in citizenship education, it is important to explore and understand their personal and professional evaluation of such work as it affects their role as a teacher.

For the last decade I have been exploring these concerns in schools in the Reykjavik area of Iceland. I have been running an intervention and research project called 'Students' Socio-Moral and Interpersonal Development'. This is a citizenship education program, directed towards elementary school children, with the aim of providing a basis for community involvement and political literacy as they grow older.

In this project, I have firstly guided teachers in working constructively with their students on socio-moral and interpersonal issues around friendship, the school community, and the family. Secondly, I have explored students' developmental progress in interpersonal understanding and actions as a function of their participation in the intervention program. The findings indicate that teachers in the intervention program were better able to improve their students' interpersonal understanding in both theoretical and real-life situations than were teachers with no such special training (Adalbjarnardottir, 1993). Thirdly, I have been tracing the teachers' own professional development during the intervention program while they work with their students around these issues.

This paper makes preliminary steps to connect these analyses by exploring how teachers' professional development during the intervention program relates to students' progress in interpersonal understanding. The question is whether teachers with greater professional competence, that is those who have greater insights into their role and work as teachers, are able to foster greater progress in their students' interpersonal understanding. We focus on four classes (two classes of 8-year-olds and two of 11-year-olds).

Teachers' perspectives

Data collected about the teachers' work included classroom observations and the teachers' own reflections, from interviews and written reports. This paper focuses on teachers' aims and teaching strategies in promoting students' socio-moral and interpersonal growth. Using an analytical tool we have been developing (Adalbjarnardottir & Selman, 1997), I provide an initial portrait of the similarities and differences in the professional competence of the two of the four teachers who were teaching the 8-9 year-old children.

Lilja's aims and strategies

In reflecting on her work, Lilja's said that her aim was that the students should "get along well in the classroom." She wanted to improve social relationships among her students: "It is important to discuss social conflicts in class so that they don't happen again; what we can do to improve companionship, so they realise that we have to put up with each other, that we cannot really get along by fighting." Lilja appears classroom-oriented in her emphasis, focusing on teaching students to get along to avoid fighting. She had broadened her aim in a later report where she reflected on students' progress; they were "doing well in social interactions, respecting each others' opinions, attitudes and feelings." However, we do not notice much reference to the importance of long-term educational goals beyond the classroom of this work on socio-moral and interpersonal issues (see Table).

Lilja was very warm and friendly, but also determined, in her interactions with students. She worked carefully on the specific tasks assigned during the intervention program. When she ran discussion sessions they went smoothly; her questions were open and structured and she was patient and supportive towards the students. However, we saw very little independent effort on her part to develop thematic tasks other than those organised at our meetings. Also, it seemed too much of an effort for her to integrate our tasks smoothly into other classroom work. For example, in her school there was a project going on about the school environment: this would have provided a prime opportunity for her to integrate interpersonal issues. Instead she reported that she found it difficult to find time

for dealing with our tasks because the other subjects took a great deal of time. She did not seem to have a clear overview of the work, or long-term goals.

Anna's aims and strategies

Anna's themes were democracy, autonomy, and respect. Her focus on democracy was reflected in her aims to develop "more democracy" among the students and in her belief that optimal communications between a teacher and students should be "very democratic." Further, she emphasised her aim of enhancing students' autonomy: "I view it as number one priority that the teacher respects the children and their opinions, because if we immediately start at school to take their autonomy away, we cannot expect them to be independent individuals later in life." As her long-term aims are rather general at this point, we would classify her perspectives as integrated reflections according to our model (see Table).

Towards the end of the programme, Anna seemed to put her aims more strongly into context: "It's important that they [the students] can stand up for themselves, dare to say no, and do not rely on the opinions of others. Dependence can lead to problems like drug abuse." Further, she expressed her belief in the importance of fostering democracy by promoting the students' autonomy and respect for others' opinions:

It is natural in our society, characterised as it is by democracy, that the children have the opportunity to take part in such decisions as what they want to study. In our society they have to learn to respect others, to listen to each other, and to make democratic decisions regarding various issues. Our society is too much directed by very few people. In a democratic society like ours we take it for granted that everyone gets the opportunity to participate. But our society is too much controlled by a few people, as in general people don't express themselves on various issues. Thus, I find it important that the children get the opportunity to build up self-confidence by expressing their concerns and by experiencing the feeling that their idea is adopted, or that although it hasn't been agreed to this time, it might be next time. When I was in elementary school we were not allowed to decide anything by ourselves. That may be part of the reason why our society today isn't a very open one.

Here Anna places her aim of creating democracy among the students in a broad educational, sociological, and political context. It is clear that she is preparing her students for active participation in a democratic society, a society she feels is not democratic enough. She feels the school has not been responsible enough in this regard and refers to her own experience as a child. She is well aware of the students' psychosocial needs, which she associates with her own role as a teacher in preparing them to make democratic decisions. At the same time she emphasises the interplay between autonomy and respect for others: "You can be independent without putting other people down; we have to teach the children to respect others' opinions, to learn to listen." According to our model, we now classify her reflections as integrated and context-based (see Table).

It was an adventure to visit Anna in her classroom. She had high expectations of her students, encouraged them to question, think critically, and to be creative, but also to be conscious of individual differences among students. She was independent in organising her teaching around the socio-moral and interpersonal issues of the program. She

integrated our themes smoothly into other classroom work (such as the Icelandic language), and also organised large projects (for example, one called Friendship Island). She offered a variety of activities for the students, including discussions, role-playing, painting, music, poetry, reading, and creative writing. In short, Anna was very active, integrative, creative, and sensitive to students' opinions and feelings about the work. Her teaching style was characterised by encouragement and warmth. There was clearly a mutual respect between her and her students.

One example of how Anna had gradually created a supportive community in the classroom was when the class faced the responsibility of dealing with moral values. Three of the girls in the class were suspected of having together taken some candy from a store. Their classmates felt strongly that this had to be discussed in class. The reaction of the students reflected their awareness of their responsibility as members of a group, of having to solve problems in order to keep a strong, trusting relationship alive in the classroom, and of the necessity of following moral rules. First, Anna decided to talk with the three girls to get their perspectives. They were very open about what they had done and expressed their own feelings as well as an understanding of how they thought their classmates felt about the matter. Then Anna asked them to come to an agreement on how to solve the problem with regard to their classmates. The girls presented their solution to their classmates for discussion, saying that all three of them were equally guilty, that they regretted having taken the candy, and that they would never do such a thing again. They also suggested that the problem should not be discussed any further in class. After some consideration and discussion the class agreed to this.

This is a good example of how Anna as a teacher aimed at promoting her students' *understanding* of moral values, fostering their *skills* in communicating about moral values, and deepening the *meaning* they made of moral values as related to their real-life actions. In this work she was concerned about having her students be aware of different points of view and about coordinating these perspectives. In her work we witnessed her deep respect and care for her students' voices (democratic decisions) by fostering both their autonomy and intimacy.

Table. An analysis of professional development of teachers' perspectives: aims and teaching strategies by four awareness dimensions

Awareness dimensions	Aims	Teaching strategies
Externally based reflection	Focus on improving students' overt behaviour in the classroom. Short-term aims	Focus on additive teaching skills to improve students' overt behaviour
Internally based reflection	Focus on improving classroom atmosphere for both the students and self as a teacher. Short-term aims	Focus on additive teaching skills to improve the classroom atmosphere
Integrated reflection	Focus on the psychosocial needs of both the students and the teacher in relation to each other both within and beyond the classroom but not contextualised. Short-and long-term aims	Focus on various teaching strategies and activities to promote students' social growth and life skills but not contextualised
Integrated and context-based reflection	Focus on preparing the students for an active participation in society. Reference to important individual life competencies and skills which are differentiated and contextualised. Both short and long-term aims	Focus on various teaching strategies and activities to promote students' social growth and life skills which are contextualised with a reference to different background, competencies

Differences in teachers' aims and strategies

This preliminary analysis revealed that the teachers who were more insightful had an understanding of the importance of promoting children's socio-moral growth and a more profound interpersonal understanding, and this was reflected in their aims. They looked both within and beyond the classroom, with long-term concerns for students' active participation in society. In practice, they also seemed to have a clearer overview of the work. This was related to their teaching strategies. They were clearly more autonomous and committed, and appeared more active and creative in dealing constructively with the moral and interpersonal issues, integrating them into their own teaching. Next we explore how the teachers' professional competence related to the students' growth in interpersonal understanding.

Teachers' professional competence in relation to students' progress

Twelve students (six girls and six boys), selected at random from each of the four intervention classes, participated in the study. In assessing their interpersonal understanding, the students were interviewed in the autumn and again in the spring about interpersonal dilemmas which focused on negotiations about different perspectives with either a teacher or a classmate over classroom activities. One such dilemma was as

follows: a student thought she was working hard on a group project, while her classmate feels she was not. The students were first asked to define the problem, focusing on the feelings of those involved. Then they were asked to find different ways to solve the problem, to select the best one, and finally to evaluate the outcome. Students' responses in each of these four steps were classified at one of the four developmental levels of perspective coordination: impulsive, unilateral, reciprocal, and mutual (Adalbjarnardottir & Selman, 1989).

Our preliminary findings indicated some differences in the students' progress in interpersonal understanding, depending on the professional competence of the teachers. Students working with the more insightful teachers seemed to improve more, taking more often both classmates' perspectives and feelings into account, than did the students in the classes with less insightful teachers.¹ These teachers seemed to provide the students constructively and actively with group discussion and activities in which they could struggle with conflicting perspectives in interpersonal relationships. Such work may have challenged the students' interpersonal understanding more than comparable work carried out by the less insightful teachers.

Boys in classes with the more insightful teachers tended to improve more in their interpersonal understanding than did boys in classes working with less insightful teachers, while girls in the classes improved at comparable levels.² This finding may illustrate changes in the teachers' interpersonal style towards the boys. As one of the more insightful teachers reported, instead of using unilateral ways of blaming the boys for the "misbehaviour" in the classroom (a behaviour commonly cited in the literature, e.g., Dweck, et al., 1978), she used more reciprocal ways, encouraging the boys to consider both persons' perspectives when solving interpersonal problems. It should be noted, that given the sample size this is a more exploratory study which reminds us of being careful in our generalisations from the data.

Closing considerations

Given the essential role teachers have in promoting students' citizenship awareness, we have to be especially aware of how we can best support them in working effectively and responsibly on citizenship education. In order to be able to guide practice and to inform policy, it is important we continue to explore on the one hand the differences and similarities in the way teachers give meaning to citizenship education, and on the other how teachers' professional competence relates to their students' citizenship awareness. Accordingly, we must continue to develop frameworks to portray the flow between teachers' developing awareness of their work and their changing capacities to promote their students' citizenship awareness.

¹ A four-way (age x gender x professional competence x role (teacher vs. classmate)) repeated analysis of variance was computed. $F(1,40) = 6.07$, $p = .018$. Difference scores: Classmate situation, $M = .33$ (more professional) vs. $.14$ (less professional); teacher situation, $M = .21$ (more professional) vs. $.20$ (less professional).

² $F(1,40) = 4.10$, $p = .050$. Difference scores: Boys, $M = .33$ (more professional) vs. $.10$ (less professional); girls, $M = .20$ (more professional) vs. $.23$ (less professional).

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