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Democratic participatory citizenship: what can teachers and schools can do towards it?

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Four attitudes

A pilot study (Niemczynski, 2001) helped to define four attitudes of teachers towards students' participation. These attitudes can be ordered in a series, beginning with the most remote from the meaning and ideals of participation:

1. 'Student participation is to be conceived as the way students follow the teaching programme'; i.e. students have to accept goals and means implied by the teaching programme and have no possibility of contributing to it.
2. 'Student participation means involving students at a time determined by the teacher/when it is convenient for the teacher'. This has moved from an impersonal programme to one regulated by the personal decisions of the teacher, who allows the students to make interventions of suitable content and form at the right time (from the teacher's point of view).
3. 'Students have the opportunity to express opinions and submit proposals, but it is the teacher who decides what shall be accepted'. Students' contributions are allowed and invited by the teachers. However, the teachers do not make a link between the two realms - the freedom of ideas and proposals offered to the pupils, and their own teaching, on which the students' contribution has no impact.
4. 'Teachers keep their students well informed and sometimes students are consulted by them about aspects of the process of their education and learning; teachers negotiate with the students about how to work together in the classroom and sometimes the students can make the final decision'. Several conditions of participation are recognised here: the sharing of relevant knowledge among the parties involved; the educational care of pupils on the part of the teacher; equal respect assumed by negotiating the joint activity; and learning how to take responsibility for the decisions in the process and for the process itself by both students and teachers.

How popular are these four attitudes?

In order to answer this question a study was conducted with 323 teachers. The teachers were given the four statements listed above and were asked to choose one statement. They were also asked to explain their choice. The actual material given to the subjects is shown in Table 1.

Table 1 Student participation

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|----|--|
| a. | Student participation is conceived as the way students follow the teaching programme. |
| b. | Student participation means involving students at a time determined by the teacher when it is convenient for the teacher. |
| c. | Students have the opportunity to express their opinions and submit the proposals, but it is the teacher who decides what shall be accepted. |
| d. | Teachers keep their students well informed and sometimes students are consulted by them about aspects of the process of their education and learning, they negotiate with students about how to work together in the classroom and sometimes the students can make the final decision. |

Please decide on one, and only one, of the above four meanings of student participation which most closely reflects your own understanding, and then give your reasons for your choice.

To explore the possible significance of the outcomes of this study for citizenship education, one can transpose the questions asked and the answers obtain into the context of nation state citizenship and European Union citizenship (see Table 2). This is a useful analogy because

- the school as a social entity provides first-hand experience and opportunities to learn how to be a member of a community and how to be a participant in decision-making processes;
- social-political set of values constitute an important part of the educational ideas practised in schools.

Table 2 Transposition into the European Union or nation state citizenship situation

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|----|--|
| a. | EU (or Polish) citizens' participation is conceived of as the way EU (or Polish) citizens follows the EU (or Polish) government programme. |
| b. | EU citizens' participation means involving EU citizens at a time determined by EU government and when it is convenient for the EU government. |
| c. | EU citizens have the opportunity to express their opinions and submit the proposals, but it is the EU government who decides what shall be accepted. |
| d. | EU government officers keep their EU citizens well informed and sometimes the EU citizens are consulted by EU government officers about the aspects of the process of living together; EU officers negotiate how to work together in the EU and sometimes EU citizens can make the final decision. |
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The findings

The group of 323 participants was divided into six subgroups (see Table 3) . The first two were prospective teachers who are now first-year Jagiellonian University students (University students I) and their older colleagues (University students II). Next are the teachers of an Association of primary and middle schools in Krakow who meet together in order to foster a pupil-centred educational practice. The Association teachers I group comes from schools which are more advanced in the process of transformation than those of Association teachers II. The Primary school teachers were chosen randomly from schools in Krakow, and the Vocational school teachers from the Krakow area. The Music school is a primary school attended by primary school pupils in parallel to their general primary school. The last group consists of teachers of various primary and middle schools in Krakow.

Table 3 Choice of action formula by groups of participants

Choice	1	2	3	4	Total Participants
University students I	4 (13%)	-	6 (19%)	21 (68%)	31 (100%)
University students II	-	-	9 (22%)	32 (78%)	41 (100%)
Association teachers I	-	1 (3%)	17 (46%)	19 (51%)	37 (100%)
Association teachers II	3 (4%)	2 (3%)	35 (47%)	34 (46%)	74 (100%)
Primary	1 (3%)	1 (3%)	16 (50%)	14 (44%)	32 (100%)
Vocational	1 (3%)	-	17 (53%)	14 (44%)	32 (100%)
Music school	3 (18%)	1 (6%)	13 (76%)	-	17 (100%)
Various schools	2 (3%)	-	21 (36%)	36 (61%)	59 (100%)
Total	14 (4%)	5 (2%)	134 (41%)	170 (53%)	323 (100%)

Chi-square (21 df) = 55.0273, $p < .0001$

Choices 4 and 3 are the most popular among teachers of all groups, although it is interesting that no music teacher chose Choice 4. It is also interesting that the group with the highest proportion choosing Choice 4 was the older university students. The overall pattern of results strongly suggests that the idea of student participation is very attractive to all participants in the study: minor intergroup differences may reflect differences in the social climate of particular schools. However, the major differences suggest that those who have minimal practical knowledge of schools (the older group of university students) are much more enthusiastic about the idea of student participation than the actual teachers in schools.

The participants in the study were also asked to give reasons for their choices by answering the question: ('Why should the option you have chosen be the best way to deal with things?') (see Table 1 above). The answers were assigned by two independent judges to the four meanings of pupil participation represented by the statements in Table. For instance, one of the participants chose Option 3 because 'Teachers should follow the

teaching programme and decide whether the pupils' proposals are linked to it. While taking the tests based on national curriculum they (the pupils) will be assessed and nobody will take their vision of education into account.' This justification uses the first meaning of pupil participation to argue for the choice of Option 3. Another respondent chose Option 4 and gave reasons which implied an understanding of pupil participation Type 2: 'We should partly collaborate with the pupils in order to motivate them to learn. The programmes of schools are determined clearly while the methods depend on teachers, who should assess their pupils in order to choose the most efficient and attractive methods.' The judges worked independently through the answers and were in complete agreement on 78% of the cases. The remaining 22% were resolved in joint discussions on each case.

Let us look now at the reasons given by the teachers to support their choices. People asked to explain why they make a particular choice do not argue the same way for the same statement. The classical examples of this variety are provided studies of social-moral judgment by Jean Piaget (1965) and Lawrence Kohlberg (1984). These authors argue that it is not the choice itself but the underlying reasons which give social-moral meaning to the choice, and that the interpretation of choice may point to different levels of maturity or development as well as to different contextual emphases.

The most frequent choice of reasoning about student participation is Type 3 (see Table 4) - one position earlier in the series than the most frequent choice of action. There is also an increase in the frequency of reasonings typical of Types 1 and 2 in comparison to the frequency of the respective choices shown in Table 3. The pattern suggests that interpretations of participatory actions are much less sophisticated than the action formulae choices might imply (compare again with Table 3), which may be evidence of action choices being made in advance of a consideration of the actual meanings and value interpretations of the choices.

Table 4 Reasons given by groups of participants

Reasons	1	2	3	4	Total Participants
University students I	4 (13%)	10 (32%)	12 (39%)	5 (16%)	31 (100%)
University students II	3 (7%)	1 (2%)	21 (51%)	16 (39%)	41 (100%)
Association teachers I	6 (16%)	5 (14%)	14 (38%)	12 (32%)	37 (100%)
Association teachers II	21 (28%)	14 (19%)	26 (35%)	13 (18%)	74 (100%)
Primary	5 (16%)	9 (28%)	10 (31%)	8 (25%)	32 (100%)
Vocational	8 (25%)	7 (22%)	10 (31%)	7 (22%)	32 (100%)
Music school	6 (35%)	9 (53%)	2 (12%)	-	17 (100%)
Various schools	11 (19%)	16 (27%)	16 (27%)	16 (27%)	59 (100%)
Total	64 (20%)	71 (22%)	111 (34%)	77 (25%)	323 (100%)

Chi-square (21df) = 80.1964, $p < .0000$

There are again two interesting deviations from the general pattern of response, and they refer again to the older group of university students and to the music teachers. The latter give most reasons characteristic of Type 2 (53%), followed by Type 1 (35%) and with Type 3 the least frequent (only 12%). This suggests that for this group of teachers the notion of student participation may be more of a *façon de parler* than a realistic action possibility. The older group of university students provides very few cases of reasons of Type 1 and Type 2 (only 7% and 2% respectively). The vast majority present reasons of Types 3 and 4 (see Table 4). Given that they have no experience in teaching, the pattern may suggest a theoretical or ideological attitude which has not been mitigated by experience in teaching within a real educational context.

Table 6 Choice of action and reasons: coherence ratio by groups of participants

Choice & reason	1	2	3	4	Overall Participants
University students I	1	-	.67	.23	.32
University students II	-	-	.89	.50	.59
Association schools I	-	1	.77	.58	.68
Association schools II	1	1	.63	.29	.49
Primary	1	1	.69	.36	.56
Vocational	1	-	.53	.29	.41
Music school	1	1	.23	-	.41
Various schools	1	1	.43	.39	.51
All participants	1	1	.64	.38	.40

Table 6 shows the correalation between action choice and the reasons supporting it. Action choices 1 and 2 are perfectly coherent with the respective types of reasons given for them, which means that the aspects, i.e., choice and reasons, of the positions 'Student participation is conceived as the way students follow the teaching programme' and 'Student participation means involving students at the time determined by the teacher when it is convenient for the teacher' are well integrated. There is less coherence between action choices 3 and 4 and the respective reasonings.

This lack of perfect coherence or stability can be taken as evidence of attitudes in the process of construction. Taking the whole group, one can say that the process of building Attitude 3 is much more advanced (.64) than the same process for Attitude 4 (.38). Since it is consistently so for all groups, it may be taken, together with the stability of Attitudes 1 and 2, as evidence for a developmental process - people moving from Attitude 1 through Attitudes 2 and 3 to Attitude 4.

Jim Rest (1979) offered a methodological argument in the area of social-moral development studies for using a ratio of the number of new perspective cases to the number of old perspective cases to identify how far the construction or development process goes in building a new stage in a sequence of stages. By analogy, one can take a

ratio of the action choice and reasoning coherence which is less than .20 as an indication that the process is about to begin. Thus values between .20 and .80 would be indices of the actual process of construction of a new attitude, and values between .80 and 1 would indicate that it has reached a stabilisation phase. In this interpretation of the values of the coherence ratio, all the groups are in the process of building Attitude 3 ('Students have the opportunity to submit the proposals, but it is the teacher who decides what shall be accepted'), although they are at different stages within the construction - the music teachers are the beginners while the older university students are the most advanced, with the other groups falling in between (see again Table 6) – and all groups except the music teachers have begun the construction phase of Attitude 4 ('Teachers keep their students well informed and sometimes students are consulted by them about aspects of the process of education and learning, teachers negotiate with the students about how to work together in the classroom and sometimes students can make the final decision'). All groups show a lower value for Attitude 4 than for Attitude 3, which would be expected if these attitudes are part of a development continuum (see above).

Conclusion

The data suggests enough strongly that teachers' acceptance of student participation in the school process is at best at the stage of construction: if so, then a model of a democratic participatory citizenship can be at most an emerging end of education in our schools.

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