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Citizenship education - challenges, possibilities, difficulties

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Background

I work as a lecturer in Social Studies at the University of Helsinki's Department of Teacher Education, and during my three years as a member of CiCe I have been working as much as possible on the topic of citizenship. This topic is challenging and not easy. CiCe has given me many important contacts and experiences and it has encouraged me to develop and increase my own knowledge of the topic, while at the same time my students and I have developed questions such as 'Are there any limits to what can be considered citizenship education?'

One basic question is: are we talking about education *about* citizenship, education *through* citizenship, or education *for* citizenship? And at what level - community/local, national, European, global? How much has it all to do with voting activity and the right (or sometimes even the duty) to vote, what roles do money, rights, duties, responsibilities and qualities play? In my work it is very important to also concentrate on citizenship education at other levels –

- the development of ways of thinking;
- critical awareness;
- judgement-making skills;
- debating;
- problem-solving;
- the possibilities for and of democratic participation;
- encouraging students to be honest with themselves;
- giving relevant, lasting information about knowledge and
- about the different ways to actually teach citizenship.

I think in Social Studies one always has to take care not to be too indoctrinating.

Some citizenship exercises/ processes

In this paper I concentrate only on the broad outline of some topics/lessons we have been working through with student teachers in Helsinki (my usual workplace), in Tallinn (Pedagogical University), and in Helsinki with Socrates/Erasmus program students and Nordplus-program students from different countries.

Our work has always aimed to reflect on the purposes of education in relation to the economic, social and also political issues of our societies on the one hand; and in relation to culture, society and identity on the other hand. We think it is important to reconsider the categorical distinction between education and schooling, arguing that education, not just schooling, is more necessary than ever in our postmodern times. The focus has been

on the one hand on our own values and attitudes, and on the other what it means and how we see it in our practice.

Firstly I asked students to write some free associations for about 15 minutes in order to come to a definition of citizenship - what, why, when, how? – after which the students speak about their writings and arguments. The next steps were to develop didactic exercises for pre-school, primary or secondary school children. I provided my students with a list of concepts they had to give a ‘lesson’ about. The concepts were: tolerance, honouring, humanity, ability to work, independence, ability to communicate, ability to learn, a sense of duty, honesty, education, ability to think, their native country, environment, nature, creativity, family, health and culture. Everybody had to choose three concepts and put them together to provide the basis of their ‘lessons’. The students were very motivated: the discussions were very intensive and they really were able to give and get feedback. I had to ask myself “Who is the teacher?”! After the discussions we built and increased our theoretical awareness.

Texts which students wrote reports about were:

Helena Allahwerdi: *The global Citizen I*. The Finnish UN Association. Helsinki 1997

William A. Corsaro: *Social Changes, Families, and Children. Examining Changes in Families from the Children’s Perspective* .

William. W. Corsaro :*The Sociology of Childhood*

Hannele Niemi: *Recreating Values. From Value Free Teacher Education to Value Reconstruction* . (Book: *Moving Horizons in Education. International Transformations and Challenges of Democracy*. Edited by Hannele Niemi. University of Helsinki. Department of Education. Helsinki. 1999.

Alistair Ross: *Children in an economic world: young children learning in a consumerist and post-industrialist society*. (Book/*Educating the whole child. Cross-curricular skills, themes and dimensions*. Open University Press.

Rauni Räsänen: *Becoming Teacher in a global Village* . (*Moving ...*)

Tapio Varis: *Media Education. An urgent Challenge for Teachers and Teacher Education*. (*Moving...*)

I gave students feedback, and they reported that they learned a lot of important things and became more aware of relationships between different learning matters etc. They thought all the supporting articles stimulated their learning since they provided a strong theoretical framework.

Some conclusions

Empowering students with an awareness of professional demands cannot happen without reflecting on it in the context of a real situation: thoughts, knowledge, values and attitudes. There is a difference between having a profession and being a professional. I prefer to use the term ‘professionalism’, which I define as having understandings, knowledge, skills, procedures, and an appreciation of ways of working with people. There is a very good discussion of this issue in the book *Civic Education Across Countries: Twenty four National Case Studies from the IEA Civic Education Project*, edited by Judith

Torney-Purta, John Schwille and Jo-Ann Amadeo, International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA), Amsterdam, 1999.

Today most societies have a continuing interest in the way their children and young people are prepared for citizenship and learn to take part in public affairs and social life. Issues which are arising seem to be questions of responsibility - who has to take it, when, why, how? Perhaps in the past it was easier to find excuses or explanations for denials of responsibility for reasons of class, gender, race, age, geographical location, family circumstances, but there are increasingly demands that these issues be addressed. It is particularly crucial for those at risk of exclusion from society. Who are they? It is impossible to foresee or determine who might be excluded in the future, but everybody has his/her right to receive attention and to have the knowledge of support that will allow them to develop as a person, and as a citizen.

Governments should see the social role of a broad education from the point of view of policies which relate to many actors e.g. in curricula, learning/teaching/educating procedures and practices. It is a question that spans many environments and many levels. Nowadays there is much material concerning local education, global education etc., and we find the same values linked with citizenship education. And the most important issue remains the individual.

Throughout the ages many professions have committed themselves to ethical guidelines that express the attitude and sense of responsibility that the professions require their members to take towards their work. Ethical guidelines of this sort articulate shared professional values and principles. The teacher should fulfil society's expectations about the direction in which it wishes to guide learners. The changes taking place in society have, however occasioned a situation in which many teachers are forced to undertake matters for which they cannot bear sole responsibility.

According to the *Finnish Teacher's Professional Ethics* the change in the role of teachers has brought them closer to the learners, but the issue of the teacher's power and responsibility is always a part of evaluation of the learner, for example. An internalised sense of ethics prevents teachers from abusing their position. The *Ethics* considers clearly the value behind teachers' professional ethics: human worth, honesty, justice and freedom. It also considers such subjects as teacher and pupil; the teacher; the teacher and his or her colleagues; the teacher's relationship to the work; and the teacher's relationship to the society. Such topics were included in our discussions and I believe are all continuing themes.

Many other interesting questions arose: What does it mean in practice to think globally and act locally? How can indoctrination be avoided in the teaching/learning process? Are there other legitimate questions we should be asking?

One thing is sure: we have asked pertinent questions, have been very involved and maybe we have got some answers, too.