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Postmodernity and Globalization through Education: in search of a new critical citizenship

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Postmodernity and Globalization: A New Era?

In the last twenty years developments have led to the impression that the era of modernity has come to an end and that we are heading towards a new era, defined with the preposition 'post-', and this is trying to elucidate its identity and peculiarity by referring both to the previous and the new situation. What, however, remains unresolved is whether the relation between post-modernity and modernity is mainly one of disruption or one of continuity and post-development.

What is strongly questioned in post-modernity is the idea of modernisation, which modernity regards as a result of reason and the use of scientific and technological developments by humans. Lyotard defines post-modernity as the mistrust to the grand narratives. Modern culture, writes Lyotard (1993), is organised round grand narratives, such as Progress, Emancipation or the Enlightenment, which establish the values of society. By doubting the 'grand narratives', the heavenly and universal truths, the quest of prevailing conditions through which to interpret things, is considered a Utopia. According to Giddens (1990), post-modernity expresses the belief that we can't know anything without doubt, that there is no teleology in history. In the place of grand narratives, what remains are the linguistic games, in which the meanings and the rules are imposed by the social institutions through which languages are made.

For the interpretation of reality, according to the post-modern view, a new form of 'criticality' is required. Criticality is the form of mentality that acts as an effective factor to the creation of ideas, and as a tool to the cause of environmental changes, which afterwards affect conditions. Post-modernism is critical both to the social context and to itself. It accepts the existence of the danger that postmodern divisiveness of cultural aspects under the prevailing context, with a sovereign civilisation, (which, if not taken seriously, will emerge in every aspect of human activity) might lead to homogenisation of culture. From this perspective, modernisation and the nation-centrism of modernity and post-modernism may be the two faces of the same coin, which entail the danger of maintaining or even widening the social (and educational) inequalities. On the other hand, the broadening of this dialogue does not mean the removal of the inequalities, but means their realisation and the progress for their restriction (Ramon Flecha, 1999).

Furthermore, in post-modernity the developments at the end of the 20th century, scientific, social and financial, led to a situation expressed with the term Globalisation. Globalisation is marked with the principles of complexity, permanency of change, alteration of overall social dynamics, space and time distance and de-defection.

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Globalisation means the creation of social relations through indefinite space and time limits, in which the possibility of transformation is intense and extensive (Giddens, 1990). Although there are voices that support the positive effects of Globalisation (especially in underdeveloped countries), in the West the facts lead to an unstable reality, which is marked in the economic sphere (Rifkin, 2001).

The relation between the social and political dimensions with the economic in the bounds of Globalisation - although this is not nor must not be thought as new - entails the danger of mankind become the means and not the reason for economic efficiency. In post-modernity the request for the reinforcement of the social and political dimensions, self-control and self-fulfilment, cannot be understood, since the economic sphere prevails in the social environment as a constant sphere of reality (Rifkin, 2001). In order to avoid such a condition there is a need for democracy both in individual and social levels, and therefore a new citizenship is needed. Education has a great contribution to that and citizenship education is a basic tool.

Citizenship Education in Modernity

At this point I will demonstrate the notion of critical citizenship education as presented by the two critical traditions: critical thinking and critical pedagogy. Through this, I will detect their deficiencies for postmodernity, and thus lead to the notion of critical citizenship in postmodernity.

The Rational Decision-maker (Critical Thinking)

The connection between the teaching of thinking and citizenship education was evident in the curriculum work and research of Oliver and his associates in the 1960s and early 1970s. The experimental curriculum was intended to teach students to clarify and justify their positions on public issues. The specific focus was to develop students' thinking through jurisprudential reasoning and decision-making, and advance the civic value of rational consent (Newmann, 1989; Oliver & Shaver, 1966).

More recent scholarship on social education also connects democratic citizenship with students' thinking abilities. These are based on a conception of citizenship which holds that good citizens know how to participate in public affairs through rational decision-making. That is, democratic citizenship involves not only the acquisition of knowledge and information relevant to social life or political issues, but also active decision-making on matters of social concern (Pratte, 1988).

Pratte (1988) argues for a revitalisation of civic education. Citizens in a democracy need to possess certain civic virtues such as a commitment to human dignity and mutual respect, and an ethic of obligation and community service. Pratte believes that an intellectual dimension is required as a complement to the moral development of citizens. He states, 'Teaching students to be reflective thinkers is to cultivate conceptual abilities, skills, habits, and dispositions that embody the ideal of rationality. Rationality, in turn, is to be understood as being coextensive with the relevance of reasons'. For Pratte, what he terms reflective thinking is a key element of civic competence and needs to be taught directly.

Engle and Ochoa (1988) argue in their curriculum framework for social studies that citizens in a democracy are ultimately responsible for the actions and policies of their government, thus: 'Decision-making skills and all of the knowledge and attitudes that goes into the making of intelligent decisions is at the heart of democratic citizenship'. Individuals must be empowered to collect, sort, verify, and apply meaningful knowledge to problems and issues under deliberation. To facilitate this end, the authors argue for social studies education in which 'we can create for the students an authentic decision-making situation'.

Each of the above examples stresses to some degree the importance of decision-making to productive citizenship in a democracy. For these educators, democratic citizenship involves critical thinking that advances rational decision-making on social and public issues.

The Critical and Empowered Citizen (Critical Pedagogy)

Efforts by writers in education and political philosophy have both critiqued and extended the notion of the citizen as rational decision-maker. In these formulations, democratic citizenship may include skills and dispositions to examine issues and information, and to make sound decisions in the political arena, but it also entails some explicit form of opposition or resistance to the existing order and attempts to transform it into a better one. A few examples will serve to illustrate this conception.

Paulo Freire's (1970, 1973) work has influenced a number of critical educational scholars and practitioners around the world. Based on his endeavours in Brazil, he outlined a project, which attempted to move adult students 'from naiveté to a critical attitude at the same time we taught reading' (1973). He unreservedly rejected the notion that the proper role for students was one of passive receptor of established knowledge and information. For Freire, education for democracy involves developing a critical consciousness, which leads to socially transformative action.

Citizenship education for Banks (1990) should help students develop knowledge, skills, and attitudes for participation in society. Importantly, however, it should also encourage students to transform and reconstruct society. To become effective citizens, students need to be taught to 'formulate their own knowledge and perceptions of various groups and their roles in society and to develop the ability to justify rationally the validity and accuracy of the knowledge and concepts they acquire'.

Wood (1984) argues that schools in general and citizenship education in particular teach students a very limited view of democracy. To broaden and extend democracy, he proposes an alternative pedagogy for democratic participation which fosters the following conditions: participants are decision-makers rather than merely influences, participants have access to the necessary information upon which decisions will be based, and participants have equal power to determine outcomes of decisions. Teaching students to think in this type of pedagogy entails that they become 'critically literate' in which they are able to understand their own histories, analyse socially oppressive social structures, and evaluate alternatives to the existing order.

Giroux (1978, 1987) argues that critical thinking is a political act. Civic education, however, typically teaches a form of rationality that frames knowledge and learning in simply technical terms. The effect of this is the construction of the citizen who participates in the social arena to further his or her self-interests. It also tends to defend or maintain, rather than transform, oppressive social structures. Giroux advocates for a critical pedagogy that permits 'teaches and students to engage in critical dialogue, to recover 'dangerous' memories and subjugated knowledge, and to affirm and critically interrogate the traditions that are taught in classrooms' (1987). In short, students are to be empowered as both 'critical thinkers and transformative actors' (1987).

In his formulations for curriculum for social action, Newmann (1990, 1989) emphasises fostering students' competence to influence public affairs. This influence, supported by in-depth study, reflection, and discussion, should be in accordance with democratic and ethical principles. Citizens should deliberate and work to generate agreement on the nature of the public good. Actual participation by students can contribute to the welfare of the community, to students' sense of competence, and to the empowerment of disenfranchised groups. However, making explicit what is typically implicit in schooling is one of the important components of pedagogy aimed at social change.

Coming from somewhat of a different perspective than previous authors, Barber (1984, 1989) advances a notion of 'strong democracy'. In the strong definition of democracy, politics is done by, not to, citizens. Among the principal characteristics in a strong democracy are activity, involvement, commitment, obligation, and service. In contrast, individualism, and liberal democratic theory from which it derives, form what Barber (1984) calls 'thin democracy.' Values of a thin democracy are means to 'exclusively individualistic and private ends'. In his formulations, Barber promotes decision-making in civic participation but advocates that educators nourish in students the capacities for 'public talk.' This kind of discourse is 'not talk about the world; it is talk that makes and remakes the world' (1989).

Civic participation as construed in these examples extends the conception of the decision-making citizen to include notions of empowerment, social transformation, and shared meanings in a community. The capacity for some form of critical thinking is presupposed in each of these formulations and this capacity, it is asserted, can and should be taught in schools. It is important to note, however, that although these examples stress the importance and possibilities of schooling for a critical and empowered citizenship, many of them fail to articulate specific curricular or pedagogic considerations that might promote this goal (cf., e.g., Apple, 1986; Liston & Zeichner, 1991).

Critical Citizenship Education in Post-Modernity

In this section I explore the discourse of postmodernity and the consequences and sides it creates for a critical citizenship education. In order to do so I first examine the context of education in postmodernity and then will proceed to the content.

The Educational System in Postmodernity

Post-modern education is concerned with the fact that, although the incomes of education are the same for all, the outputs for the majority of the educational goods continue to remain unsatisfactory. Groups at risk in education do not take advantage of the educational incomes that are given to them. It is argued that the educational system is organised according to elitist cultural incomes, leaving out women, those who are not white, people with different sexual orientation, the disabled and the lower classes. In general, those normally excluded from the educational system are the majority, and this demonstrates the anti-democratic nature of the system.

Education today is oriented to market-driven demands and has lost its basic characteristic to free the human spirit: it has been charged as being a device of social control to meet the demands of the post-industrial society. The OECD, EU and World Bank's decisions on education exemplify an education focused on serving the economy. Education is ignored as a human cultivating process, as a *paideia*, and concern is mainly about its economic effectiveness. This raises serious questions, such as what is the role of schools in the dominance of knowledge that serves the economic elite, could this be changed? This role for education is restrictive, because it prevents education not only from changing itself but also from changing society (Wood, 1984, E. Konstantellou, 1990). Such a possibility is presented, for example, by Dewey's educational theory, which saw education as a direct mechanism for social change and claimed that the reform of society was possible through schools (Dewey, 1968). This condition, to which modernity (and capitalism) is leading, needs the undertaking of new roles from the school in post-modernity, so as to make it a resistance device to the increasing commercialisation of life. The question that arises: what kind of society do we deserve?

Towards a new paradigm of Critical Citizenship Education in post-modernity

At this point I present suggestions which could help towards a 'criticality' that will include the main point that post-modernity causes or invites us to accept as a different mentality. It can be supported that the 'paradigms' of the rational decision-maker - Critical Thinking and of the critical and empowered citizen - Critical Pedagogy, although strong in their conception are not adequate for postmodernity.

What post-modernity shows is that there is no single representation of 'truth' and ideas are always context based and affected by space and time. This as a consequence leads us to support that the ideas that represent us do not have the right to appeal to others, since we need to admit that there is not only one 'truth'. At the same time, there is a suspicion that they will probably change in some future time. Therefore we have to abandon certainties. It is always of high importance to question ourselves all the time. To admit our faults is an important virtue of a critically thinking citizen in any time or place (Burbules, 1999). This ability gives us possible perspectives, which are valuable if combined with imagination.

In post-modern citizenship education, differentiation of the arguments and their sources is an essential condition. This means that we have to expose ourselves to different situations and to exchange ideas with different people without considering these as

unfamiliar, distant or incompatible. We have to think in a different way, to appreciate the personality of the 'other' and the 'different', to broaden as society and as mentality. Because it is impossible to discern the thinking gaps alone by ourselves, the maintenance of social and inter-personal conditions, through which the exchange of aspects and views takes place, is of great value for the development of the citizenship education contents. To respect other people's ideas is an indispensable condition.

Post-modern citizenship education can be related to imagination as a force of utopian creation and as a combination of judgment and representation, which cannot be related to the deductions of the scientific work. An obvious proof is the fact that someone can always use imagination, especially when in a difficult situation. But it also can be cultivated.

Open thinking must be included in the content of citizenship education. What we could claim that post-modern citizenship education makes us accept is to think against conventions, the obvious and prejudices. The constant decoding of the world and open thinking can have valuable virtues such as creation and variety against stability. We must admit that there are worse things than being wrong and that is to be constantly and dully right (Burbules, 1999). We have to let go of the narrative that the self is essentially rational, and moreover that the language is able to transparently represent reality.

The sense of 'criticality' is not an individual virtue. Because it is related with inter-subjective doubts, criticism and creation, it has to do with the wider social frame and it has a social character. Thus, we need to broaden the 'Social Paradigm'. The sense of 'criticality' gives communicational opportunities and characterises what we are, what we do and not only what we think (Burbules, 1999).

Conclusion

In post-modernity, the sense of 'criticality' does not offer essential definitions about reality, which should be compared to apparent self-awareness of people. It has rejected the historical and philosophical certainties. It wants to overpass the connection between reasonable and reality. On the one hand, the main approaches that we already have (for Critical Thinking and Critical Education) either stress the value of the naturally given freedom of humans or the power of their mind to imply the possibility of emancipation with political and not with the social change of the rules.

This democratisation does not mean homogenisation but the right of everyone to be different and to be educated according to this differentiation. Post-modern citizenship accepts the human right to demand, to be different from those who used to be so indifferent towards social disparity.

Critical citizenship education in postmodernity aims at the democratisation of the educational system in order to achieve the democratisation of the society. We must dream of better schools in a better world. In this way we will keep the 'utopian sparkle' alive, which is considered to be important to every creative and progressive society. We may have been led to a doubt of the utopia for prosperity, which was promised to us in

modernity, but in post-modernity we need the nostalgia of a utopian vision for real Democracy in the rights, the dialogue, the goods and in the differentiation.

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