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# Teaching controversial issues in context: Greek Cypriot student -teacher perceptions of citizenship

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## Introduction

Citizenship has constituted one of the main aims of education since antiquity, as evidenced in Aristotle (*Politics*) and a number of Plato's works (e.g. *The Laws*, *Protagoras*), yet the concept of citizenship remains very difficult to define (Ross, 2000; Scott, 2002). Each state gives the concept a different meaning, according to the current political ideal that it advocates, and contemporary theories differentiate 'nation' and 'identity' and recognise multiple identities that co-exist in a variety of ways. Since identities are socially constructed, different societies through history have developed different discourses concerning citizenship.

To examine citizenship education in different countries requires the contextualisation of meaning, processes and results, because different social, economic and political conditions imply different understandings of the concepts of citizenship, social, national and professional identities, in addition to the understanding of the characteristics possessed by the 'good citizen'. Although the national focus is interwoven with the international, (Giddens, 1981) the political trends are not in parallel or harmonised, as opposing interests within the same society (Apple, 1993; Young, 1997) and between societies provoke different interpretations of practices of communication and action.

For countries such as Cyprus, with a long and unresolved political problem, the contextualisation of political and social understanding focuses on the pervasiveness of a stable national educational culture (Koutselini, 1997; Koutselini and Papanastasiou, 1997) which affects and is affected by the national problem. It is thus important to investigate how student teachers in Cyprus today understand the meaning of citizenship, and to what extent they correlate it with the national problem. This study is the first step towards constructing a framework within which the teaching of citizenship can develop.

## Methodology

This study is a part of a long-term project aimed at effecting a conceptual change among student teachers and primary school students regarding controversial issues in citizenship. The project has three purposes:

1. to identify controversial issues in the context of Cyprus. The underlying assumption is that contemporary Cyprus society is characterised by great sensitivity on issues of national identity, culture and civilisation, social coherence, acceptance of otherness, and respect for human rights because of the Turkish occupation of almost half of Cyprus's territory.
2. to reveal and externalise the misconceptions surrounding such controversial issues (e.g., national versus social identity, civilised country versus rich/powerful or/and friendly country).
3. to enhance students' conceptual change through action research. It is important initially to help students gain awareness of their misconceptions or/and biased beliefs

through participation in the collaborative and reflective incidents of action research. The use of diary-keeping and evaluation through conceptual mapping techniques encourages reflection on talks and actions and conceptualisation of new action without misconceptions and biased beliefs.

Student-teachers' conceptions of citizenship will be presented in this study. The aim was to investigate student-teachers' understanding of the meaning of citizenship. The assumption underlying this study is that contextualisation of Cypriot student-teachers' understanding will reveal that the concept of citizenship is closely tied to the unresolved political problem of Cyprus. More specifically the present study sought to answer the following questions:

1. What are student- teachers' conceptions of citizenship?
2. What is the notion of community and how is community related to the concepts of citizenship?
3. What is the linkage between the conceptions of citizenship and Cyprus's specific context?

### **Population and sample**

The participants in the present study were fifty (N=50) Greek Cypriot students in their third and fourth years of study in the Education Department of the University of Cyprus, who were enrolled for the Fall semester of 2000-2001 in the course *Curriculum Development*.

Participants included eight male and 42 female students - a representative sample of the gender distribution of the population in the Department (80% female and 20% male). The study sample comprised the whole population.

**Table 1 Student-teacher conceptions of citizenship**

<p><b>1</b> <b>Recognition of Citizenship</b></p>	<p><b>2</b> <b>Exercise of Duties and Rights</b></p>	<p><b>3</b> <b>Engagement</b></p>	<p><b>4</b> <b>Reconstructive Attitude &amp; Action</b></p>	<p><b>5</b> <b>Interactive Attitude &amp; Action</b></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Possession of duties and rights</li> <li>• Acknowledgement of duties and rights by the state</li> <li>• Equality</li> <li>• Protection by the state</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Acceptance of public values</li> <li>• Obedience of Law and Order</li> <li>• Protection by the Law</li> <li>• Lawful behaviour in a democracy</li> <li>• Nationalism – traditional continuation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Voluntary engagement in associations</li> <li>• Conformity</li> <li>• Political participation controlled by the political parties</li> <li>• Community service</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Contest for better conditions</li> <li>• Formation of ideological sub-groups</li> <li>• Intensive critique</li> <li>• Struggle to gain control</li> <li>• Emancipation interest</li> <li>• Action for furthering interests (social, political, civic)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• National is compatible with international and global</li> <li>• Critical but not nihilist</li> <li>• Communication</li> <li>• Interactive action</li> <li>• Critical political participation</li> <li>• Acceptance of difference</li> <li>• Personal development linked with community benefit</li> <li>• Value of community work</li> <li>• Multi –culturalism</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Power imposition</li> <li>• Governmental control</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Control by democratic values and laws</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Control by the political parties / hegemonian groups</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Power construction</li> <li>• Resistance to the control</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mutual responsiveness</li> <li>• Control for the interest of individuals and community</li> </ul>

### **Design and instrumentation**

The phenomenographic paradigm of conceptual change was selected as the most appropriate for concepts related to citizenship, because:

- a. the phenomenographic theory of conceptual change implies a change in the individual's relationship with the world (Marton, 1986) and not merely a change of concepts;
- b. phenomenography advocates contextualisation of conceptions and conceptual change.

To explore conceptions of citizenship a semi-structured interview protocol was specifically developed. Participants were asked about their understanding of the concept 'citizenship' and whom they considered to be citizens of Cyprus; what characteristics they attributed to 'good' citizens; how they defined the relationship between nationality and citizenship; and to what extent they believed that national and European identities are developed at the expense of the other.

The theoretical frameworks were defined only after a holistic understanding of the data. In order to organise the framework for the classification of the conception of citizenship, a continuum chart was developed (Table 1). All categories of the conceptual continuum were derived inductively based on a study of the interviews by two researchers. Student-teacher discourse was analysed repeatedly until some conceptions emerged from the data. These categories were revised until it was possible to construct a general schema of thought which included the majority of the defined characteristics in each category.

From an analysis of the data using the same procedure a 'notion of community' emerged which corresponded to the five categories of the continuum (Table 2).

To investigate student-teacher notions of community two procedures were employed. First, the notion of community was derived inductively by the two researchers from student references to nations, states and the European Community in the interviews. At this stage some tentative correlations emerged. Second, after the researchers identified a correspondence between the concept of citizenship and the notion of community, participants were asked to specify the correspondence of the categories of community to the five conceptions of citizenship. Their answers were used as a means of control of the tentative categories which led to the construction of Table 2.

**Table 2 Citizenship and the notion of community**

The concept of citizenship		The notion of community
1. Recognition of citizenship	→	1. Nation – State
2. Knowledge of duties and obligations	→	2. Nation – State School Family Company
3. Engagement	→	3. National and international
4. Reconstructive attitude and action	→	4. Similar situations and interest all over the world
5. Interactive attitude and action	→	5. State – European community – Global community

To gather information about the connection of citizenship to the specific historical-cultural context in Cyprus, the two researchers worked separately on the construction of concepts - items that indicated contextualised understanding. Three subcategories resulted from their analysis: the national problem; national ideals & traditional values; and the restoration of human rights. The number of references (Berelson, 1952) applicable to each subcategory were coded. The following information was also noted (Kraft, 1981; Selnow, 1990):

*Positioning:* 1. favourable, 2. unfavourable, 3. neutral (i.e., informative, non - value loaded presentation).

*Prominence:* 1. major, 2. minor or passing visibility and significance, 3. implicit (i.e., assumptions not expressed directly but inferred).

*Linkage and structure:* 1. presented as an individual item, 2. tied to other value/concept/issue structures.

## Results

Student-teacher conceptions of citizenship vary significantly (Table 3). Five categories were formulated:

- recognition of citizenship,
- knowledge and exercise of duties and obligations,
- engagement,
- reconstructive attitude and action,
- interactive attitude and action.

These categories constituted a continuum since the characteristics within each category were differentiated, the criterion being the degree of passiveness (the first category of the continuum) as opposed to the degree of actualisation of citizens (the last category of the continuum).

**Table 3 : Student-teacher distribution of conceptions of citizenship**

Conceptions	f		%		TOTAL	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	f	%
- Recognition	1	2	12.5	5.0	3	6.0
- Knowledge	1	10	12.5	24.0	11	22.0
- Engagement	3	15	37.5	36.0	18	36.0
- Reconstructive attitude & action	2	14	25.0	33.0	16	32.0
- Interactive attitude & action	1	1	12.5	2.0	2	4.0
TOTAL	8	42	100	100	50	100

The majority of student-teachers considered citizenship as an active concept (Table 3) since 45 out of 50 related citizenship to a system of duties and obligations (22 %), engagement (36%) and reconstructive action (32 %). The weakest conceptions of citizenship were recognition of duties and rights, expressed by only three students (6 %); interactive attitude and action, was expressed by two students (4 %) (Figure 1).

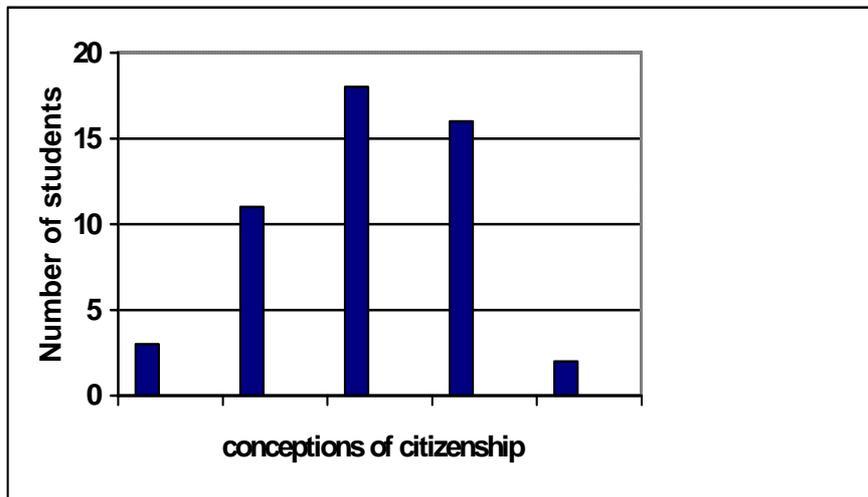
**Figure 1 Student – teacher conceptions of citizenship**

Table 2 shows that the more passive conceptions of citizenship correspond to the more closed notions of community. Thus a parallel continuum emerged concerning the Nation and State, International, European and global Community.

Beyond the general categories of the conception of citizenship it is important to refer to some results that helped to contextualise student- teachers' understanding (Table 4).

All the "active" concepts of citizenship are strongly related to the specific social and political context of Cyprus, i.e., the national problem, resolution, national ideals-values, and restoration of human rights. All concepts and items are value-loaded and aim explicitly at connecting the conception of citizenship with the specific political problem.

The national problem is mainly linked with two conceptions of citizenship: reconstructive attitude and action, and exercising duties and obligations. These were explicitly elaborated as a problem which emerged from the Turkish invasion and occupation. Interestingly, only the three interviews (1 male, 2 females) which coded conception of citizenship as recognition of citizenship (1st category - Table 1) had no explicit reference to the items in Table 4.

## **Discussion**

The data reported in this study provide information on student-teacher conceptions of citizenship and community; the study also provides useful information on the contextualised perceptions of student-teachers which derive from Cyprus's historical-cultural background as well from the contemporary political problems and aspirations of Greek-Cypriots.

### **The continuum of citizenship**

The majority of students attribute an active character to the concept of citizenship (Categories 2, 3 and 4 of the continuum).

Student-teacher perceptions of citizenship as a system of recognition and exercise of duties and rights (Categories 1 and 2) take us back to the 19th century conception of citizenship (e.g., Alfred Marshall, T.H. Green) according to which citizenship becomes the basis of equality, since reciprocity among citizens, and between citizens and the state, protects both individuals and community. In this system legitimisation of power has been equated with legalisation; citizenship is ensured by external control whose aim is to create 'peaceful' and 'satisfied' citizens.

**Table 4 Citizenship in the Cyprus context**

Item	Frequency 50 Interviews N= references	Positioning 1. favourable 2. unfavourable 3. neutral – non value –loaded presentation	Prominence 1. major 2. minor 3. implicit	Linkage & structure
National problem – Resolution of national problem	45/55	1	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• reconstructive attitude &amp; action</li> <li>• knowledge &amp; exercise of duties &amp; rights</li> <li>• Turkish invasion &amp; occupation</li> </ul>
National ideas – traditional values	40/45	1	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Knowledge &amp; exercise of duties and rights</li> <li>• Greek identity</li> </ul>
Restoration of Human Rights	42/80	1	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• reconstructive attitude &amp; action</li> <li>• engagement</li> <li>• interactive attitude &amp; action</li> <li>• national problem</li> <li>• Turkish invasion &amp; occupation</li> </ul>

The strong linkage between the meaning of citizenship as obligations to 'national ideals' and 'culture' points to the contemporary Cypriot notion of "fear that cultural and economic globalisation is threatening the core identity and cohesion of the nation-state" (Gilbert, 1996: 42). This fear has a long history based on centuries of citizenship education as cultivation of the national-Greek identity. That feeling became stronger when the threat of a resolution of the Cyprus's problem based on "Neo-Cypriot" identity and ideology with diminished national identity had been suggested (and rejected) immediately after the Turkish invasion (1974) (Koutselini, 1997: 403).

The student-teacher conception of citizenship as engagement illustrates a conventional participation that is based on conformity, continuing the 'universal' non-differentiated conception of citizenship. The role of political parties is very important in the conception of citizenship as engagement. Especially in Cyprus, the role of politicians and political parties becomes hegemonic, since they handle the political problem and they officially represent the political claims of Cyprus in all international forums.

The conception of citizenship as an reconstructive attitude and action underlines disputable claims about the 'universality' in equality that can be secured with laws, without any provision for social support and differentiated treatment. Iris Marion Young's notion of "differentiated citizenship as the best way of realising the inclusion and participation of everyone in full citizenship" (Young, 1997: 257) finds some implementation in citizenship as reconstructive attitude and action. The interesting point of this conception of citizenship is that Greek-Cypriot students relate reconstruction and emancipation with political rather than social claims. They argue for a political solution to the political problem which is oppressing ethnic groups; they are critical of politicians and political rhetoric; and they are ready to struggle for Cypriots' human rights that have been subjugated by the Turkish invasion and occupation.

Conception of citizenship as reconstructive attitude and action includes notions of T.H. Marshall's civil and political components of citizenship: "rights necessary for individual freedom ... the right to own property and conclude valid contracts, and the right to justice and the right to participate in the exercise of political power, as a member of a body invested with political authority or as an elector of the members of such a body" (1997: 294). Student-teachers refer mostly to 'human rights', supporting Turner's statement:

In brief, the social rights of nation-states are being slowly replaced or, better still, augmented by human rights. First, these new form of citizenship are not specifically located within the nation-state, and are typically connected with human rights legislation rather than with civic rights. The communities that supports these rights are global, virtual and thin, rather than local and thick. (Turner, 2001: 204)

What appears in the continuum of citizenship conception as interactive attitude and action is not a precise notion derived from specific student-teachers interviews. In their discourse two students included most of the characteristics of this category, but interviews with other students revealed similar notions, most often incompatible with or unrelated to their main points. Correlation of the conception of citizenship with the notion of community (Table 2) reveals that interaction, action and communication surpass the boundaries of state and nation to regard community as a wider whole, where mutual responsiveness provides the basis for individual and national interest.

Although this concept of citizenship as interactive attitude and action appears an ideal, it is important to note that it is the least competitive and the most unreal; it functions at the level of a utopia where everything is calm and peaceful, without controversial issues, struggles for power, and oppression. Mutual responsiveness circumscribes the transcendence of opposed interests, conflicts, and contesting rights and obligations. This conception of citizenship may be a product of aspirations or the result of an idealistic education which prevents any critical discourse and deconstruction of myths.

Nevertheless, it should be noted that most of the claims derived from the interactive conception of citizenship have - again - a political basis. Characteristically, one student declared:

It is time to transcend the close community's political problems and ask for the wider community, the European Community, the International Community to contribute to the resolution of our political problem. The Community values support our political claims. For that to be done we need to become actual members of the European and the International Community.

## Conclusion

The most important factor in citizenship education in Cyprus is the national political problem; conceptions of citizenship are strongly linked to this conceptualisation of students' understanding and education. European citizens cannot be considered as 'harmonised' in their understanding of citizenship since the political, social, economic, and educational realities in different countries, imply different discourse, experiences and internalisation of the same concepts.

The real problem with citizenship education is that it is difficult to foster respect of equality and difference at the same time; these issues are related to power and how to control it. Who has the power in citizenship education in Europe? Who must have the power in citizenship education for Europe and how can equality among the different countries be achieved?

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