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CiCe
Institute for Policy Studies in Education
London Metropolitan University
166 – 220 Holloway Road
London N7 8DB
UK

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Values, identity and intercultural learning: adult educators reflect on the meaning of inclusive citizenship

Carmel Mulcahy

Dublin City University (Republic of Ireland)

Education for critical citizenship questions the aims of education itself and to do this it must incorporate three essential elements: historical critique, critical reflection and social action.

Giroux (1983: 193.)

Writing on the Crick Report in Britain into the teaching of Citizenship and Democracy Richard Bailey (2000:27) highlights that, in addressing education for citizenship, teachers can no longer afford to focus solely on a narrow curriculum. They must be prepared to articulate their own vision of what citizenship means to them. The advent of citizenship education presents a timely opportunity to focus on the development of reflective practitioners who can actively engage with their students, identify, develop and transmit democratic values and facilitate the growth of what Giroux refers to as 'critical citizenship'. The work described in this paper is strongly influenced by Giroux's notion of citizenship, but its roots lie much further back in John Dewey's approach to education as 'an active and constructive process' (1916, p 38) where both teacher and student will strive to construct meaningful and relevant knowledge. In the case of citizenship education, this requires discourse into the notion of *what* knowledge is meaningful, *whose* knowledge is meaningful and *how* knowledge is constructed.

The origins of the module Values, Identity and Intercultural Learning, around which this paper is built, also owed much to Schon's (1987) notion of reflective practice as the students, in many cases for the first time in their adult lives, took time to consider their values, the values of their organisations and the sometimes deep chasm between the two, and also began to reflect on the concept of identity, particularly Irish identity and whether it was possible to possess multiple identities. The aim of the module was to raise awareness of these key issues, to confront perceptions and perspectives and in the final stage to use this knowledge and understanding to construct a vision of the type of citizenship education they wished to construct with their students. As the remainder of this paper highlights, our efforts at curriculum development were to some extent lost in the fascinating emergence of theory through diaries, discussions and group work. Far from being a negative outcome, the efforts towards the development of an enlightened pedagogy for democratic, inclusive citizenship education had an impact on all of the students and in some instances, as described in the paper, led to changes in work practices which will impact on Irish society as a whole. The remainder of this paper sets the context for the learning, describes the students and their explorations and sets this against the backdrop of a rapidly changing Irish society.

Change

Change in society can prove painful and disruptive. In Ireland we are wealthier than we have ever been in our history. We have embraced the concept of being European and adapted well to a faster pace of life, changed patterns of employment and a shift from a rurally-based farming way of life to an increasingly city-based population. Perhaps the

biggest change has been the shift from a predominantly mono-cultural, Catholic society to an increasingly diverse multicultural population. In 1992 there were 39 applications for asylum in Ireland. Today the figure stands at around 10,000, with an estimated increase of around 3,000 per year.

Our experience of emigration and the prejudice suffered by Irish throughout the developed world ought to make us less racist and intolerant. However, as the results of the Euro-barometer (2001) on attitudes to cultural diversity indicate, the reality is very different. Irish opinion on the impact of ethnic diversity shows a growing level of suspicion when compared with the previous Euro-barometer (1997). There is cause for concern around our baseline attitudes to tolerance of difference, equality of opportunity for minorities, and multiculturalism as an enriching force in Irish society. A mix of prejudice, power and social processes has challenged the attempt to create an intercultural society.

As Irish society begins to level off from the heady days of the Celtic, it is to be envisaged that a hardening of political attitudes towards minorities will become even more apparent. The impact of recent court cases which denied immigrant parents of Irish-born children an automatic right to Irish citizenship has seen for the first time in recent years a decrease in the monthly figures for asylum seekers from 1000 to 700. However, there is no escaping the reality of a changed society and given the negativity of our current attitudes, it is clear that education should be at the forefront in addressing the challenge of developing respect for diversity.

Education

The challenges which faces Irish education at all levels is to provide equity in education in an increasingly multicultural society; up to now this been given little prominence. We look to experiences in the US and Britain to guide our approach to multicultural education and true integration of ethnic minorities into our education system. However as Garcia (1999) reminds us, the issues surrounding cultural and social diversity are not a new phenomena and were debated by Plato and Aristotle. There is a strong argument to suggest that Ireland has never been a mono-cultural society (Critchley, 2001), but the reality of our diversity is now visible and this has heightened the need to address issues of ethnicity, identity and citizenship in all aspects of Irish life. The role of education in addressing these crucial issues cannot be overstated. In a message of support to the Conference on Minority Ethnic Groups in Irish Education run by the Higher Education Equality Unit in 1996, the then President of Ireland, Mary Robinson, commented on the role that Irish education can play in creating a more tolerant, less racist society.

To be truly inclusive society must value and respect difference and the process is greatly facilitated when there is an informed appreciation of the richness that diversity confers on communities. Education has a key role in dispelling the ignorance and prejudice that are so often the cause of intolerance within society.
1997, p10

We can take consolation from recent research which supports the notion of education as a starting point for positive social change. Up to 70% of respondents to the Euro-barometer indicated that the inclusion of children from minority groups enhanced the education of all Irish children. The denominational nature of Irish education is a

stumbling block in our efforts to be multicultural. This has been further exacerbated by the recent Education Act of 1998 which enshrines the religious ethos in law, while also respecting the diversity of values, languages and traditions in Irish society.

The New Primary Curriculum (1999) acknowledges the principles of pluralism, respect for diversity and the importance of tolerance. A balanced and informed awareness of diversity 'should help children to understand the world and contributes to their personal and social development as citizens of a global community.' (p27) From a curricular perspective, these issues are specifically addressed in the newly developed Social, Personal and Health Education Module. The White Paper on Education (1995) which examined all aspects of Irish education also highlighted the need for education in 'areas such as human rights, tolerance and respect/understanding for cultural diversity' (pp203-04). As a response to this, the Department of Education (DOE) introduced a Civic, Social and Political Programme which was first examined at Junior Certificate Level in 2000. This programme aims to prepare students for participatory citizenship and to develop the skills of critical appraisal based on human rights and social responsibilities. A detailed review of these initiatives is to be found in the recent publication by Osler and Vincent (2002). While they applaud many of the initiatives that have been put forward by various elements in Irish education, they are mindful of the threats to global education in Ireland from a growing racism and the danger of Global and Citizenship Education being reduced to a subject within the curriculum (p92).

The White Paper on Adult Education (2000) places a strong emphasis on the principles of interculturalism and equality. It addresses the need to 'frame educational policy and practice in the context of serving a diverse population' (DES, 2000: p13). Specifically, the White Paper addresses lifelong learning from the perspective of its contribution to six priority areas, namely:

- consciousness raising
- citizenship
- cohesion
- competitiveness
- cultural development
- community building.

Consciousness raising specifically refers to an 'empowering process of self-discovery towards personal and collective development', while citizenship refers to the role of adult education:

in enabling members of society to grow in self-confidence, social awareness and social responsibility and to take an active role in shaping the overall direction of society—culturally, socially and economically and environmentally and to engage proactively in community and societal decision-making.

DES, 2000: pp28-29

The publication of the White Paper on Adult Education marked an epoch for those involved in the field as it gave recognition and direction to all those involved in the delivery of adult education. It also supported the need for accredited training to degree

level. This need was also identified by research into the Training Needs of Trainers (2000) (Mulcahy *et al.* 2000). The research revealed that many of the trainers interviewed may not have had any formal training in delivery methodologies, in curriculum design or in the psychology of learning.

Training in the sector needs to look at wider issues, issues around values and personal issues. It is not sufficient to sit in a boat and sail down the river. Trainers in the sector need to be able to direct and steer the boat along its path. Trainers need to be taught to look at themselves and their philosophy of education.

Mulcahy *et al.*, 2000, p 31

It was against this research and the guidelines provided by the White Paper that a decision was made within Dublin City University to expand the existing Certificate and Diploma in Further Education and Training to a full-scale degree qualification. One of the two key themes chosen for the degree was the field of Access and Inclusive Citizenship. The remainder of this paper looks at one module within this theme and how it impacted on the adult trainers from the perspective of values, identity and interculturalism.

Student responses

In September 2003, DCU introduced the BSc in Education and Training. The primary target for our courses are educators and trainers in the further education field, who to date have not received any formal teacher training. The emergence of this field and its fairly recent acknowledgement by the DOE has heralded a major paradigm shift in Irish education from a singularly academic approach to a recognition of a diverse education and training sector. Further Education includes the Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme (VTOS) for the long term unemployed; Youthreach, which caters for early school leavers; prisoner education; Traveller Training Centres to cater for our ethnic traveller community; centres catering for people with disabilities; area-based partnerships and community initiatives. Trainers from all sectors were represented and also included were trainers from private companies and Irish insurance brokers.

The module entitled Values, Identity and Intercultural Learning was developed in response to the growing diversity of the client group that the trainers would meet on their programmes. I was also conscious that there was no existing module in place to address the area of Citizenship in adult and further education. My hope was that this programme, through its emphasis on reflection and group interaction, would generate an interest in the field which would lead the group to devise their own curricula. As the Accreditation Board for the programme had emphasised the need to focus on the skills of critical thinking within the programme, I opted to focus 75% of the assessment on a reflective log, which would probe readings and encourage the sharing of ideas in this sensitive area. The remaining 25% would be given for an academic paper highlighting the steps towards formulating intercultural curricula.

Aims and objectives

The general aim of the module is to generate enquiry into the role of democratic values and how these values impact on the students' roles as trainers and educators. A further aim is to allow students an opportunity to reflect on the relationship between individual identity and the growth of informed citizenship. Emphasis is placed on the growth of

intercultural understanding in the affective and cognitive learning domains, with the key objective of allowing students an opportunity to reflect, explore and design curricula around democratic values, identity and active citizenship in the field of adult education. Students explore a range of readings around values education, values in education, the hidden curriculum and ethos, the reflective practitioner, issues of identity and inclusive citizenship, and methodologies promoting inclusive learning. These include cultural communications, learning theories, diverse learning styles and participatory learning through group work, debate and experiential learning.

Outcomes

The area of values created the greatest amount of controversy for the students. One student reflected on how her own values were formed. Commenting on an early life of brutality she came to the realisation at six years old of what she calls *'the powerfulness of power'* though not understanding what power actually meant. For this student compassion and a thirst for justice became key values which shaped her life and dominated her contribution to society, work and the community. For another student of mixed race, a reflection on her values led to the definition of values as *'an individual experience having a positive intrinsic worth, instrumental to existence'*. In introducing the concept of values into her teaching she adopted the motto *'Dare to care'*. For her this encapsulated the key value of respect but also demanded action to live out their values from the students, even in difficult situations. For yet another student, the study of values led her to the basic interpretation of values from the perspective of minimum damage.

I believe that 'do no harm' is a core value, although it may be interpreted very differently in different cultures. Values built on that maxim are dependent to a greater or lesser extent on culture and upbringing.

The process of looking at values did not prove easy for many of the students. Yet the value of the exercise was accepted by most. It may not be an easy experience to look at our values and our beliefs but as educators, I believe it is a constructive and positive experience.

I believe that I have never really had to test or question my values. I have never really had any great values dilemmas and I think that I do not have any hard-held conviction. I seem to have adopted a middle-of-the-road attitude and as a result I have drifted through the last fifty-four years without delving too deeply into what it is, exactly, that I value. I am very uncomfortable having to put the spotlight on my values.

Throughout the process it was evident that for this particular student the exploration of values would dominate his thinking. He began to question in particular his training values and as he ran a commercial training company he realised that for him training was more about developing competencies than encouraging students to optimise and develop their potential. His diary explored the relationship between values, policy and practice and the hidden curriculum

I now accept that the hidden curriculum in any organisation will be an accurate reflection of the real values within that organisation. I cannot see or do not want to see where I am going with this. I am avoiding the main issue for me, which is

that the insurance industry in which I work and provide training is a racist industry.

This realisation led to a complete change of practice in which up to now non-nationals were weeded out of the training process because they did not fit into the employability profile. He now has taken two non-national trainees onto his current course and has interviewed the head of the Equality Authority to highlight the inherent racism in the insurance industry. His sentiments were echoed by another student.

Where does change come from? It comes from me. I now can look at my values and realise that I should be fighting for the rights of all trainees, irrespective of race, and that I have a duty of care to highlight the implications of diversity within my centre.

The growth towards this realisation of critical and informed citizenship was a fascinating journey, which the limits of this paper cannot even begin to capture. In the words of one student

It was a frightening journey through the mist of uncertainty yet in some ways the answer was always there. On reaching the end there was a great feeling of relief, emancipation and achievement. It was the best of times, it was the worst of times.

Other key issues explored included identity formation, which for many proved an exciting process. Their reflections on creating spaces for the exploration of identities with drug addicts, young drop-out students and Travellers are thoughtful and inspiring. Here the key emphasis is on 'creating a sense of self and then moving on to a sense of others'. For one trainer with the Traveller community it involved a visit to the Hopi Indians and recording the insights of the Travellers into the similarities between the two cultures in areas such as family clans, language and games. The trainer remarked on the key difference of the Hopi as a matriarchal society and the reaction of the Traveller women to this! He also reflected on visits to Italy and Sweden where a similar process took place including debates around discrimination. As a lecturer I was also challenged on my own perceptions of the students and their identities, and discovered their multicultural, multifaceted identities, particularly from a religious perspective.

For many of the students, the highlight of the module was a talk given by the German Professor, Bernard Giesen, on Collective European Identity. Many of the students reflected on their reluctance to pursue a European identity and their own inherent parochialism. The final word comes from a French-born student, raised in Canada, living in Ireland and married to a Brazilian woman.

I will define myself as an exile from France but I cannot deny that I feel at home anywhere in Europe. Our concept of citizenship can no longer be based on a homogenous model. The new paradigm must be inclusive while tolerating and catering for diversity. Inclusion does not mean assimilation. It means there is room for all.

I am confident that these students will bring a new and enlightened perspective to their training as a result of their experience. The curriculum has been put forward as an intercultural module, which will be offered to all our students. I hope it will generate as much debate as it did with this group.

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