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Education Choice: for/or between Citizenship and Consumption

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This paper raises questions regarding the ability of changed and new customs to satisfy human requirements. In the worldwide situation, rapid global processes have created a new, not only social but also cultural environment, with sometimes unusual and even adverse attitudes and antagonisms between the modern of yesterday and post-modern society of today and tomorrow. The market, with all its characteristics has become for the child a new educator: between family, school and changed social environment.

As children have become an important and focused population in a strongly consumer oriented society, education for consumer knowledge and behaviour about the rules of the market and social organisation of the sphere exchanges are of central importance to their individual and global social order. This is clearly the case in debates in the mass media on education, but discussions on children consumer learning and activities are rare. The author considers the main theories and suggests possible models on the pertinent social relationship and cultural influences within which children's consumption are embedded. It has been relatively silent on children's consumption and education for citizenship, focusing on adult learning. The author draws attention to citizenship education to forward an argument that favours consideration of a broader range of social relationship and cultural and contextual influences and points out how children's consumption related learning for active citizenship may originate outside the aggressive market behaviour.

Introduction

As globalisation refers to a wide range of discrepant phenomena, it is also commonly portrayed in singular and economic terms as reflecting an evolutionary, inevitable and irreversible phase of social development. The expansion of national economic systems into an integrated, interconnected, borderless, but also competitive global market place is constructed as a 'natural' period of human civilization, progressing from agriculture to industrialism and post-industrialism with its attendant advancements in information and communication technologies and transport (Jessop, 2000; Bergeron, 2001). Recent research on globalising processes and global flows has:

- Acknowledged the disembedded and disembodied quality of many theoretical accounts of globalisation,
- Highlighted the power and knowledge relations implicit in how the people, living as a member of the global society and as an individual imagine and theorize and accept the global (Held et al.2000, Amin, 2002),
- Stressed mobility and interconnectedness and regard flows of people and flows ideas and ideologies as obliterating the tyranny of distance so that 'relationships between people in disparate locations is to be formed as easily as people in proximate ones' (Waters, 2001, p 5),

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- Created new trans-national connections and new forms of commodification that are noted to assist 'boundary crossings' and to hasten the formation of cultural hybridities,
- Replaced the national/local as an identity referent, thus establishing conditions for freeing subjects from fixed identities while reducing the possibilities for cultural domination and imperialism,
- Transformed the conditions of people's lives producing new ways of doing business and working, new forms of identity and politics, of everyday life, time, space, new forms of sociability. (Featherstone, 2002,p 4).

Some critics of globalisation have pointed out the tendency of disarticulate understanding of flows; including the troubling labour mobilities of women and children, 'travelogues' of asylum seekers and refugees are subsumed into the discourse which shows flows of people as benign, smooth and unmediated by structural problems such as poverty, war, the failure of existing ideologies, and the experiences inflicted on various peoples. However, those individuals who are free floating or fleet-footed have fewer problems: the dispositions, aspirations and opportunities of expectation of a better offer of post modern global market give many opportunities to satisfy the plurality of real but also artificial individual's needs. In the meantime it argues with the main global tendencies of such processes as increasing population, drastic growth of food consumption, escalating urbanization, degradation of natural resources, pollution of environment and possibility of global warming etc.

As such globalisation has become part of our living conditions as these circumstances have a huge impact on the lives of parents and especially children, the households they are living in and other individuals. Parents and children within their households are consumer decision-making units in the civil society to whom consumption is both a way to construct meaning and also a fundamental need for them, as consumption has to cover their fundamental and basic needs for housing, food, cloths etc.

However in post-modern societies consumption raises a wide range of dilemmas in everyday life: theoretical, practical, economically oriented, aesthetical, emotional, ethical etc. Consumers often have the feeling that consumption is the only place where they have the freedom to decide: most people see this not as 'velvet repression' but as do-it-yourself dependency. People gladly, willingly - even joyfully - enter the dependency relationship with marketing companies, with experts, technological or scientific, psychologists and psychiatrists (Pedersen, Cantell, 1992). However, family members agree consciously to limit their free will, because they depend on each other in the process of satisfying their needs; this could be explained as one of the most interesting characteristics of self-organizing systems.

Coping with the Question: Being a Consumer and a Citizen

Different conditions and criteria influence the life quality of the family the child lives in. Those choices sometimes depend not only on personal aims and priorities but also on the social system in which the family lives. In educating children for responsible citizenship the question 'Who is a consumer?' can be answered by turning to the idea of two subject positions that children growing up in the global post modern society are presented with:

- The consumer is a subject position suggested by contemporary global capitalism post-modern society of today, and:
- The consumer is understood also as a citizen and as a subject and as a person belonging to a certain state.

In the first case there is no doubt that one of the challenges the children face is globalisation, taking place in several different spheres of each post-modern society, but understood mainly by adults in the economic sphere as finance and production are, as well as consumption, a part of one global post-modern network. As also discussed by Biesta (2004), the consumer of post modern global capitalist society is a dedicated follower, a child or an adult, of fashion trends, the subject who lets its wants be defined by the real and more often by the unreal needs of contemporary production for constant expansion. Global post-modern world capitalism is not interested in individual differences – other, that is, than for the creation of new niche markets or the invention of new trends and fashions. Following Ockenden (1999), a consumer can be an under age or adult person that sees fellow humans as economic and social antagonists, competitors for limited natural resources and social, economic and individual power. For whom a protected lifestyle and social position is vital and the struggle to achieve this fosters individualism and nationalism. He/she accepts different others, young and old, as threats and for him/her diversity is not valued. Furthermore: it is ignored or even exploited! Respect is not a prime concern, nor is the welfare of the other individuals, families, communities and the environment outside his own society.

In the second case consumer is understood as a person's belonging to a state and according to different political options in a sense of:

- belonging to a political community and thus citizenship appears as the sharing of common civic life,
- loyalty towards the homeland,
- the predominance of civic duties over individual interests,

As the individual's human freedoms and rights are all regarded equal and are depositories of inalienable rights that cannot be revoked by any political or social institution.

This understanding is very close to the European definition of Consumer Citizenship:

Consumer citizenship is when the individual, in his/her role as a consumer, actively participates in developing and improving society by considering ethical issues, diversity of perspectives, global processes and future conditions. It involves taking responsibility, local and family scale when securing one's personal needs and well-being (Developing Consumer Citizenship, 2003).

However, the children and youth of today, presented diverse role understanding in their own way. Following Kolenc Kolnik (2005, p63), for them multiple perspectives are embraced and cultural diversity is valued. There is no doubt as they speak of his/her role within the global village, as a world citizen, sharing the natural resources, leading critical

discussion on ecological, social and economic problems and as they demand the responsibility of each individual in processes of not only solving them but also in sharing responsibilities with others.

As growing up today is being presented to the two subject positions, both of which can be seen as 'images' of the world citizen: the consumer and the citizen, citizenship education is for the child and youth one of those very important criteria which determines their life quality, as well as their attitude towards themselves, their selection of friends, in society and within the family they live in. That is why the settled question 'for/or between the citizenship and consumption' must be discussed and surveyed exactly from the educational aspect.

The Market as a New Aggressive Educator in Educating for the Citizenship of Today and Tomorrow

The focus of the phenomenon of children's consumption has overwhelmingly been on the role of the market as educator of children. Especially, as we recognize the market as the main and most powerful protagonist in shaping children's learning patterns in 'commercial cosmopolitanization' of their values.

The basis of citizenship education is the idea of free, creative and responsible personality development in families, in school and in the society children are living in, even when society is at a crossroads between cultural creator and consumer society. Following Giddens (1991), the child as contemporary individual is confronted with a 'plurality of choices', a consequence of the increasing salience of methodological doubt in his life project; and as contemporary consumer is confronted with significant levels of anxiety and the adopting of 'traditional' lessons that teach appropriate modes of conduct is no longer sufficient to assuage uncertainty. However as prolonged childhood became increasingly constructed in the frame of post-modernity and distanced from the economic with children being valued increasingly in emotional and sentimental sense on one hand, this construction of the childhood was far removed from the profanity of the market, creating difficulties for entrepreneurs who recognized in children 'new opportunities', 'a new niche' to expand markets. The market adds to contemporary uncertainty on one hand, but also suggests that the child as consumer can moderate uncertainty by the adoption of lifestyles, which routinise everyday choices on the other.

This determines the market as a 'new educator', even stronger as the market nowadays produces a raft of 'educational' materials (such as magazines, TV programmes, websites, computers, toys, popular culture etc.) and 'forces' children how to learn about culture more generally through consumption practice. So for the child consumption is akin to communication: goods are better than teachers' or parents' explanations in making visible the categories of culture and the relationship between the market.

As children's consumption seems to be particularly focused on the idea that the market teaches children in informal ways, children are taught about exchange values. By appealing to and knowing about the kind of things children like, the market has been successful at capturing children's attention and communicating with them permanently. This has 'allowed' the market to 'educate' children into immanent culture making this

'as a normal aspect of their lives'. The market has transformed children's general expectations with respect to the quality and manner in which information is brought to them. (Kenway; Bullen, 2001).

But as Martens et al. (2004) pointed out, this has had and still has significant implications for children's education, in the family and in school. Because the efforts of commercials have not been neutral, market discourses have generated and stimulated oppositions between market/commerce on one side and parents/family/school/teachers on the other side. The corollary is that children in the commercials field are conceptualised as framed and integrated in consumer culture analogous with the image of the full adult consumer citizens represented by their parents and other adults. This by the children is very often understood also as the opposition between fun and education, between them (children) and adults (parents). Parents may value consumer culture in different ways, even if they are not always necessarily critical of the efforts of commerce in relation to their children and in the case that domestic consumer culture may vary. Therefore parents' suitable educational strategies in working with children should include:

- Individual and group counselling, creating an atmosphere of openness and trust, with physical, emotional and cultural support for all family members,
- A common bond from which to relate to the 'outside world', regular family interaction, sharing opinions and leading discussions about what they really need, and what they wish for (but could miss) and could achieve,
- Creating an informal social environment for cultivating family roles, friendship, reconciliation and personal conflict resolution,
- Discouragement for incorrect and unwished behaviour (stealing, drinking, drug abuse, using bad words etc.),
- Children's access to the means for family economic sustainability and involving them in household occupations, creating the experience of spending household money and household time,
- A sense of place, heritage and continuity.

The necessity that such strategies for assisting parents and children in meeting educational citizenship goals must be linked to the wider social and cultural context of their lives also outlined by Martens et al. (2004), as among the broader networks of social relationships that envelops the children who grow up in a consumer post-modern society, among them especially:

- Several social actors (parents, children, peer groups, relative networks etc.),
- Institutions (the market, school system, teachers),
- Cultural discourses on 'good hoods' (which includes understandings and constructions of successful parenthood and childhood),
- Household contextual issues (single or two parent families) and
- Individual biographies (of all family members) inform the consumer cultures specific to households with children.

However, infused with power dynamics, some indications are that the market with all its commercial power at the moment has the upper hand, even when what motivates and frames the consumption of parents, children, children and social networks remains largely unexplored. Especially as the market features in the two-way relationship: with school and with parents; separately but at the same time and less interested in communicating with parents about the consumption of the children.

Children are taught how to be 'a successful consumer', what he/she needs to 'be in', how to get in 'the clique' etc. Fortunately, there are some children who seem to be immune to such requests. We assume that their families equipped them with specific consumer culture, attitudes and values. But others are victims of post-modern society values, of material culture and post-modern fashion trends, etc (Bezenšek, 2006, p168).

The role of citizenship education therefore, whether in the family or in the formal education system, is that the children should recognize and understand the purpose and success of commerce in tapping into their minds and for parents and teachers to utilise these methods in family and formal educational settings as a means to fight back, recapture and enliven children's interest in family values and formal education. Following Kenway, Bullen (2001) success in this effort requires an acknowledgement that what it means to grow up in contemporary consumer post-modern society and culture has undergone irreversible changes: therefore parents and teachers need to relinquish outdated understandings of 'prolonged' childhood that incorporate an understanding of the relationship between children and their parents on one hand and children/pupils and teachers on the other as one in which adults (parents, teachers, politicians etc.) control children. As so many children spend more and more of their daytime in formal educational settings, while at the same time being much more involved in consumer culture than past generations, the parents and the teachers should be interested in advancing understanding of the nexus between children, consumption and citizenship education.

Conclusions

Our objective in this paper was to stimulate thinking about unquestioned links between citizenship education and globalisation in educating children to be responsible consumers. We also draw attention to the question of whether someone's educational chances should be understood as for or between citizenship and consumption. Especially as the complexity of the global post-modern society has an impact on the situation of the citizenship education for and in the society as the present term 'citizen' is being added in various ways to the term 'consumer', whose concept, therefore, has little bearing on situations where self production is widespread and the world market is becoming 'local'. Even when a limited range of products are requested for a stable consumption pattern or where families live at subsistence level and only a small elite has access to choice, or simply where families reject the 'Western-American way of life', the citizen as consumer is playing a role in creating the conditions of the society he/she is living in.

As in post-modern society lifestyle preferences for children and their families are becoming increasingly important (but never the sole) determinants of behaviour. Both

the consumer and the citizen are just roles a real person may play, by two different standard interpretations of his/her prevailing aspects in given social and also familiar circumstances. Preferences do not express themselves in a vacuum, but within a particular post-modern social and economic context, within a particular system, to use the macro-level terminology adopted earlier, and this system will help to determine overall outcomes. Housing and housing policies form part of the context with which children and their families implement preferences. Parental cultural capital has a great impact on children's perception of real and unreal needs, attitudes and values, which are shaped partly by their education and partly by wide access to the mass media and other sources of information and socialization processes that homogenize commercial values.

For successful children's citizenship education standard interpretations are needed for the child to communicate: frequently occurring situations are given a pattern where roles exist for children's behaviour, and roles are given names: citizen and consumer. Further more: they bring two new aspects, 'consumer-citizenship' and 'global-citizenship' face to face. While the first is a term that itself may represent a distinct, independent concept of no territorial borders and be put to the global market, the second may be addressed as a claim for solidarity and be implemented towards any people, young and old, children and parents, employees and employers etc.

In sum, perhaps the most important finding is that human capital theory assumptions about citizenship education reflecting to consumption actually deals with adult learning about unfamiliar consumption activities and sites rather than child learning. Even as post-modern entrepreneurs have recognized in children new opportunities to expand their 'markets' and therefore sow two solutions in (re)defining:

- Commodities as beneficial/functional for children (for goods to become framed as 'useful' they must be situated directly in the child's growth and development), and
- Children themselves as persons who have the wherewithal and the right to be desirous of goods.

Children become treated more or less as autonomous, volitional subjects, they lose part of the cloak of sacredness and are enfranchised as participants in and through the marketplace. Although we have recognized the importance of citizenship education for children's 'normal' consumption (what ever it positively means), we recognized, too, that our commenting on children's consumption chose to sketch the wider cultural trends by filtering through information that effectively comes from the market, from discourses generated in the sphere of production, commercial and exchange rather than by parents and children as consumers. Even more: the literature also effectively ignores the children and parent consumer. Last, but not least: therefore new educational goals and aims to exceed skewed understanding on the social post-modern processes that form the social and economic context around which children learn to become free consumers and free citizens, are needed.

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