



This paper is taken from

Reflecting on Identities: Research, Practice and Innovation
Proceedings of the tenth Conference of the Children's Identity and Citizenship in Europe Academic Network

London: CiCe 2008

edited by Alistair Ross and Peter Cunningham, published in London by CiCe, ISBN 978-0-9560454-7-8

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Nikolakaki, M. (2008) Between Deliberative and Critical Citizenship Education: Reflections on theory and praxis, in Ross, A. & Cunningham, P. (eds.) Reflecting on Identities: Research, Practice and Innovation. London: CiCe, pp. 227 - 234

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Lifelong Learning Programme

This project has been funded with support from the European Commission. This publication reflects the views only of the authors, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

Acknowledgements:

This is taken from the book that is a collection of papers given at the annual CiCe Conference indicated. The CiCe Steering Group and the editor would like to thank

- All those who contributed to the Conference
- The CiCe administrative team at London Metropolitan University
- London Metropolitan University, for financial and other support for the programme, conference and publication
- The Socrates Programme and the personnel of the Department of Education and Culture of the European Commission for their support and encouragement.

Between Deliberative and Critical Citizenship Education: Reflections on Theory and Praxis

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Abstract

Deliberation involves an extensive outreach effort to include marginalized, isolated, ignored groups in decisions, and to extensively document dissent, grounds for dissent, and future predictions of consequences of actions. It focuses as much on the process as the results. In this form it is a complete theory of civics. This paper sets out some of the important theoretical issues for the promotion of a deliberative citizenship. Second, it examines these in the context of education. These two foci highlight a direction for educators to promote a deliberative citizenship education in schools.

Education at the beginning of the 21st century seems to be in a crisis. The crisis is located at the distancing of schools from students' interests, social behaviour and purpose in a multicultural society. Schools seem to be characterized by authoritarianism and administration seems to take no interest in students' personalities or will. Education in both content and delivery has been promoting a passive and exclusive habitus. According to Freire (1970-1990), in societies that are characterized by injustice and oppression, the owners of power define the methods, the programs, the content of education, so that the dominant culture is internalized by the masses and their oppression is continued. Thus, education in both content and delivery becomes a weapon whereby the subjugated learn to adapt to the oppressor.

Citizenship education, as a lesson and as a value in the school program in the last years has been gaining more and more attention. But citizenship education, as Heater(2001) observes, where it did exist in the past, stressed the virtues of submissiveness and patriotism, and did not seek to develop critical skills amongst citizens in order to actively engage with the political process. Radical changes that have been occurring in the economic, political, cultural and social arenas have influenced the traditional vision of what citizenship is and the way in which citizens are being constructed.

The idea of deliberation, promotes the idea of resolving issues of contention between citizens in a forum that promotes dialogue, understanding and an appreciation of difference (McGregor, 2004: 92). When citizens deliberate in democratic politics, they express and respect their status as political equals even as they continue to disagree about important matters of public policy.(Gutmann and Thompson, 1996, p.18). But deliberation can also obtain an objective: it can strip away the disguises of social injustice and the factors that contribute to it through critical lenses. Deliberation in a critical frame aims to promote social justice through communication. In this form deliberative- critical citizenship education becomes a complete theory of civics.

In this paper, I set out some of the important theoretical issues for the promotion of a

This paper is part of *Reflecting on Identities: Research, Practice & Innovation, Proceedings of the tenth Conference of the Children's Identity and Citizenship in Europe Thematic Network*, ed Ross A and Cunningham P, published by CiCe (London) 2008. ISBN: 978-0-9560454-7-8; ISSN: 1470-6695

Funded with support from the European Commission SOCRATES Project of the Department of Education and Culture. This publication reflects the views of the authors only, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained in this publication.

deliberative citizenship education towards a critical citizenship. Second, I examine these in the context of education. These two foci highlight a direction for educators to promote a deliberative-critical citizenship education in schools.

Deliberation theory in a critical context

Deliberation theory during the last twenty years has dealt with issues concerning difference in an increasing diverse multicultural world, in order to reconceptualize practices of citizenship and the role of a deliberative citizen. The idea, firstly articulated by the ancient Greeks as direct democracy involved discussion through the assembly of people-the "demos"(democracy), who engaged in debate and rhetoric in a public realm, thus resulting to decision making. Deliberation means communication, intended to resolve contention amongst citizens in a forum that promotes dialogue, understanding and an appreciation of others. It usually involves an extensive outreach effort to include marginalized, isolated, ignored groups in decisions, and to extensively document dissent, grounds for dissent, and future predictions of consequences of actions. It requires an openness, necessary when different people are involved in solving issues of a social agenda, through a collaborative, co-constructed dialogue (Cooke, 2002). For Freire, "only through communication can human life hold meaning" (Freire, 1970-1990, p.58) and "education and the empowering communication of values that promote mutual respect are interchangeable"(Freire and Faundez, 1987,p.27).

In other words, deliberation as a process depends on the affective capacity of individuals and their willingness to engage in an open dialogical process. According to Rawls, reasoning individuals have values associated with civility-the ability and disposition to listen to views that are not one's own, the cognitive skills to evaluate and measure the claims and truths of diverse others and the ability to reach collective policy decisions that are acceptable to all participants (Rawls, 1993).

According to Ranciere(2004, p. 96), "Democracy is neither a form of government that enables oligarchies to rule in the name of the people, nor is it a form of society that governs the power of commodities. It is the action that constantly wrests the monopoly of public life from oligarchic governments, and the omnipotence over lives from the power of wealth". Freire (1970-1990) also points out: "Liberation is praxis: the action of men and women upon their world in order to transform it." So deliberation needs to lead to a vision: the resolving of social injustice through actions. Social justice is not a static inevitability because any individual (or community) no matter how submerged beneath oppressive realities, is able to lift himself or herself out of a mindset of defeat and begin dialogue with the hope and reason to overcome injustice. (Freire, 1970-1990, p. 60). And education is the means for liberation, because it can create a sense of dignity and self worth.

Deliberative critical citizenship education

Deliberative citizenship education is articulated as democratic rights, and the skills and dispositions of openness, cooperation, and shared decision making as a school governance model. It focuses as much on the process as the results. According to Howard and Kenny (1992, p.211), "schools can provide students with the opportunity to

participate in a hands-on political process. This means making schools democratic". But this is not enough. As McLaren (1999, p.19) charges, "procedural liberal democracy is to some extent a prophylaxis to liberation". Democracy is not something just to talk about: it is an ethos to live in.

Citizenship education from a critical point of view needs to offer "the opportunity to engage in deeper understanding of the importance of democratic culture while developing classroom relations that prioritize the importance of cooperation, sharing and social justice." (Giroux, 1983, p.3). Citizenship education, under this reading, needs to rely heavily on the values and skills associated with social justice activism (Abowitz & Harnish, 2006). As Ayer supports "Education is an arena of hope and struggle-hope for a better life and struggle over how to understand and enact and achieve that better life".

Deliberative critical citizenship education is about learning how to connect with one's fellow citizens to confront power and authority. To reclaim democratic institutions for the poor and the marginalized deliberative critical education embraces critical thinking, conflict and controversy. Gutmann and Thomson (1996) point to three basic rights when practicing deliberation: liberty, equality, opportunity. Habermas (1989) using his discourse ethics described the ideal of reflection as a means of creating a rational, impartial method of decision making in the public sphere. But what does "democratic education" mean if democracy is considered the enactment of equality? What would happen to "democratic schooling" if democracy were recognized as "the instituting of a quarrel that challenges the incorporated, perceptible evidence of an inegalitarian logic" and "the power of the people with nothing, the speech of those who should not be speaking, those who were not really speaking beings" (Rancière, 2004, p. 5)?

"Democratic schooling" suggests that democracy is already in place as a model of government. At this part I want to emphasize the notion of entrance (Rancière). Since democracy in education is never in place, but always *enters*; it enters the scene of inequality, in schooling (or other institutions); it inserts itself, intervenes and interrupts. Democracy cannot be institutionalized, in schools or otherwise, so perhaps the best that can be done at the institutional level of schools and school systems is not to seek to offer "democratic education", but rather to leave a space where democracy may enter.

Preparation for the entrance of deliberative critical citizenship education: examination of asymmetrical relations of power

The initial aim of public school is the preparation of an informed and responsible citizen. In this effort in a democratic society, the citizenship education that is limited in the transmission of certain concepts and general historical knowledge as arguments in favour of democracy, without attempting at the same time an in-depth revision of social reality and practice of school and pedagogic relations, cannot carry out its democratic mission. As supported by Chomsky, any school that imposes the teaching of democracy is already a suspect. The less democratic a school is, the more it needs to teach democratic ideas (Macedo, 2000, p. 27). Genuine learning takes place when students discover by themselves the nature of democracy and its operations.

The students learn to become responsible citizens in situations where they are to practise power (even a small amount) and to develop a comprehension of what it means to be a responsible citizen. So that they are prepared for citizenship, students "discover" government with the establishment of their class and their school as a model, which faces the important issues of the class. A "government" of students that is organised in order to prepare for capable citizens, guarantees certain inalienable rights, establishes rules, controls the offenders, takes executive decisions and assembles and administers money, depending on the objectives of the class each time. The students that undertake the governing of their class examine a wide spectrum of questions. These are: Do we need government? If, yes, what would it do? What wouldn't it do? What kinds of legislative body would it have? On a democracy level, would direct democracy be preferable to a representative one? When would the citizen be supposed to give space to the representative government? What about at the school level? Is it possible for direct and representative governments to coexist? Is the Constitution applied in practice? Should the Constitution be modified in order to include new rights?

The students in a democratic class develop a legal system, which, in a detailed analysis and evaluation, ascertains what it creates, if it corresponds to models of social justice, and if it is efficient or effective. Rather, does it protect from undesirable behaviours? Can the logic that is developed in class be applied in the wider systems, e.g., the penal juridical system? Can the tax decisions of the government of students be used in order to open the discussion for national and local tax policies? If the students examine these important questions, the class, as government, will create those citizens that can propose law, policy, and practice, and will defend those proposals via the logic and arguments of an open discussion.

Is the government the only form of exercise of citizenship? No, of course not. Citizenship is an important attribute in various official or even informal institutions, foundations, unions and communities. It is extended to all aspects of every day life and it becomes a part of identity. Nevertheless, the government is the supreme regulating body in any society, and the indifference or inactivity of government does not change its jurisdiction to make decisions that have repercussions. The limits and prospects of a government in a future situation of an inclusive democracy could be one of the subjects that could occupy the students.

The asymmetric power should never discourage the students from the effort to correct the unfairness that is included in governing. Students are prepared to face the disproportions of power throughout their lives, beginning from the classes that are created as model governments, where an insistent effort is made to ensure that each person has equal power. Democratic education functions in order to decrease the disproportion, but also functions to help the students examine the existing unfair relations of power. The students are encouraged to participate actively in each phase of governing of their class. They have the opportunity to participate in pre-electoral campaigns and work teams for legislation at the school and class levels, and to discuss and reflect on those activities. They should search and then discuss, in depth, the obvious questions that arise in the course of time. The teacher, in a democratic class, tries to ensure that each question is treated in balance, promotes the questions and proposes further research when necessary.

Here, the contribution of the educator is considered important and concerns the growth of a language of possibility, a language that provides the pedagogic base for democracy (Giroux, 1983). Thus, education becomes a source of democratic knowledge for the social forms by which human beings live, become conscious, and support themselves. This includes knowledge of power and how it functions, as well as the analyses of those practices such as racism, sexism, and exploitation that shape and cause conflicts in daily life. Naturally, it is important here not only to denounce such stereotypes, but rather to expose and decompose the processes via which these stereotypes are produced, legalised, and adopted by society (Freire and Macedo, 1987).

In many respects, the curriculum should base itself in the knowledge that begins with the problems and needs of students. It should, nevertheless, be designed to provide the base for a criticism of the dominant forms of knowledge. Finally, such a curriculum should provide students with a language, via which they can analyze the relations and their experience in a way that is both affirmative and critical (Giroux, 1983, p. 108).

Moreover, the school class functions as space for new forms of socialization. That is to say, instead of a pressure on the individualistic and competitive approaches to learning, students are encouraged to work together in projects, both in terms of their production and their evaluation. This means that students should learn through the social forms that allow them to practise a degree of awareness on issues such as sex, racial matters, and class differences. In such a frame, the student experiences and participates. He/she acquires experiences and contributes. He/she takes part in processes, hears reflections and opinions, speaks, expresses and participates in solving common problems, strengthening his/her self-sentiment and self-esteem – a useful, if not necessary, element for the respect of others, too. As Freire claimed, he/she becomes “humanized”. Apart from the analysis of problems and questions that are in effect in the immediate context of students, the pedagogies that will be used need to be enriched with strictly suitable forms of knowledge that exist outside the direct experience of students so that their sense of comprehension and possibility is extended. This means that students should also learn other codes of experience, as well as other reasons that would broaden the horizons continuously, prompting them to examine what it means for someone to resist a dogmatic power, why should someone defend collective work, etc., thereby beginning to exercise an ever-developing knowledge, experience, participation and joint responsibility. It also means that the provision of pedagogic standards for the growth of such a citizen needs both visions and real hope, but always in a frame that renders this hope feasible (Giroux, 1983, p. 109).

Conclusions

The best way of discovering democracy in schools, and in society, is to the extent that theory approaches reality. The preparation for citizenship in a multicultural society means that the education that a student receives mirrors that society. Moreover, the preparation for citizenship cannot be for some mythological society, but for the world as perceived by students. Deliberative-critical citizenship education should examine the real problems of that society. In preparation for citizenship, the students are not excluded, and teaching is organised in order to correspond to the students’ perceptions of government and power. In this context deliberative- critical citizenship education

contributes aims to the active –critical citizen and towards a progress in social justice and the overcoming of inequalities.

Deliberative-critical citizenship education has to be distant from practical political life, which is expressed through party language. And this is because a school system in which power is distributed in party order is in danger of harming, rather than benefiting, the students in enhancing them towards a real democracy. Education for liberation and emancipation is more than knowledge and citizenship education should not be restricted to that: it is about “how to read the word and the world”(Freire and Macedo, 1987). And deliberative-critical citizenship education, I support, can contribute greatly towards this.

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