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The seven ages of life-long learning for citizenship

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Abstract

This key note address will offer a series of reflections and analyses of how identities grow and change over the life-span of the individual, and the learning processes that are used to achieve this. The survey will be undertaken with specific reference to civic identities. I will draw on a range of writers and researchers, and on pan-European examples, using cultural references that are both familiar and unfamiliar. There will also be some reference to aspects of the context of Barcelona.

Key words: Identities, Citizenship Education, Life-long learning

This conference about life-long learning, and the CiCe Academic Network is funded partly by the European Commission's Life-Long Learning programme. Although most people attending the conference are here largely in their capacity as representatives of Europe's higher education faction, albeit with interests that include learning in pre-schools, schools and colleges, this conference presents an opportunity to reflect on citizenship learning over the whole human lifespan, and to consider the development of European identities in peoples of all ages.

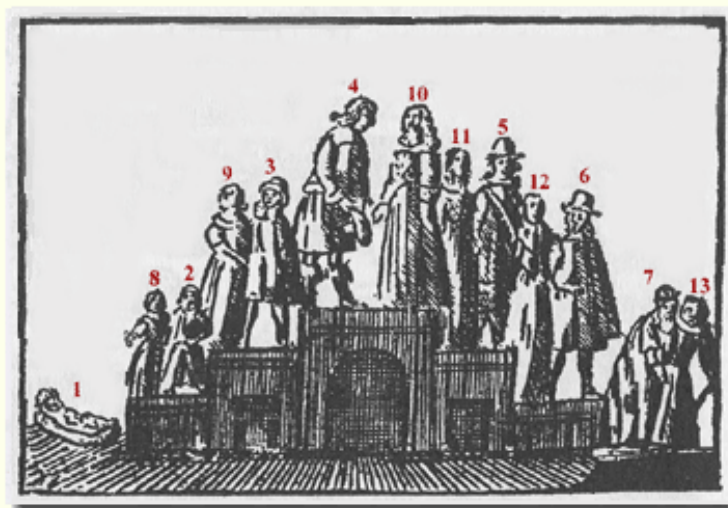
I intend in this paper to provoke some ideas about life-long learning from the perspective of learners across their whole life-span. The European Commission's Life Long Learning programme has attempted to define these stages in its series of support programmes, each named after a European educator. Thus adult education falls within the Grundtvig programme, vocational education and training is the Leonardo programme, higher education is the Erasmus programme, and school and pre-school education is the Comenius programme.

Frederik Grundtvig was the ideological father of the folk high school, though his own ideas on education had another focus. He advocated reforming a particular ailing academy into a popular school, seeking to create a new form of higher education very different from what was commonly thought of as university education. Rather than educating learned scholars, he believed the university should educate its students for active participation in society and popular life. Thus practical skills, as well as national poetry and history, should form an essential part of the instruction.

Leonardo da Vinci, the polymath artist, designer, technologist and investigator, is a particularly appropriate symbolic figure for vocational education: driven by a desire to understand what works best, how it works, his range of activity and works demonstrate almost the entire range of the vocations and technologies.

And for Universities, Erasmus, the great humanist scholar and writer: in his lifetime, it is estimated that between 10% and 20% of all items in print had been written by him. One of his significant publications in this context was his *Institutio principis Christiani*, the *Education of a Christian Prince* (Basel, 1516), written as advice to the young king Charles of Spain, later Charles V, Holy Roman Emperor. Erasmus applies the general principles of honour and sincerity to the special functions of the Prince, whom he represents throughout as the servant of the people. Unlike Machiavelli's *The Prince*, published 16 years later, Erasmus suggested the prince needed a well-rounded education, and that this would ensure that he would govern justly and benevolently and not be oppressive.

The final programme, for schools, was very appropriately named after Comenius, or *Jan Amos Komenský*, a Czech teacher and educator and one of the first proponents of universal education. Part of his output was what was possibly the first illustrated educational text, the *Orbis Pictus* of 1652.



Homo est primum Infans, 1.
deinde *Puer*, 2.
tum *Adolescens*, 3.
inde *Iuvenis*, 4.
postea *Vir*, 5.
dehinc *Senex*, 6.
tandem *Silicernium*, 7.

Sic etiam in altero *Sexu*,
sunt *Pupa*, 8.
Puella, 9.
Virgo, 10.
Mulier, 11.
Vetula, 12.
Anus decrepita, 13.

This is Plate 37, entitled *Septem Aetates Hominis*, the seven ages of man. Standing for universal education, not just the education of males, Comenius here appropriately doubles up and presents also the seven ages of woman.

Comenius was drawing on a play written just over fifty years earlier: Shakespeare's *As You Like It* (1599/1600), in which Jacques – 'a discontented melancholy lord' – develops

the central metaphor of the play in a set of arresting images and figures of speech: a person's lifespan is a play, in which they have a series of identities, with roles in seven acts:

“All the world's a stage,
 And all the men and women merely players;
 They have their exits and their entrances;
 And one man in his time plays many parts,
 His acts being seven ages. At first the infant,
 Mewling and puking in the nurse's arms;
 And then the whining school-boy, with his satchel
 And shining morning face, creeping like snail
 Unwillingly to school. And then the lover,
 Sighing like furnace, with a woeful ballad
 Made to his mistress' eyebrow. Then a soldier,
 Full of strange oaths, and bearded like the pard,
 Jealous in honour, sudden and quick in quarrel,
 Seeking the bubble reputation
 Even in the cannon's mouth. And then the justice,
 In fair round belly with good capon lin'd,
 With eyes severe and beard of formal cut,
 Full of wise saws and modern instances;
 And so he plays his part. The sixth age shifts
 Into the lean and slipper'd pantaloon,
 With spectacles on nose and pouch on side;
 His youthful hose, well sav'd, a world too wide
 For his shrunk shank; and his big manly voice,
 Turning again toward childish treble, pipes
 And whistles in his sound. Last scene of all,
 That ends this strange eventful history,
 Is second childishness and mere oblivion;
 Sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything.”

The conception of seven ages was not an original idea of Shakespeare's: it was in popular at the time, but his evocation and language have persisted, and this paper will use Shakespeare's division, not the European Commission's, as the basis for an analysis of the educational needs of a lifetime.

And in particular, the needs for citizenship education and learning that people will have at different stages of their life, because, as I will argue, people of different ages will have different needs if they are to be able to fully exercise their citizenship rights. What is the rights-respecting agenda for each age? How do they manage the successive identities, that are added to their existing multiple and accumulating identities?

**.... At first the infant,
 Mewling and puking in the nurse's arms;**

Over the past half century we have witnessed a transformation in understanding about the importance of the earliest years of life in future development. We now know how critical learning takes place in the first months and years of life, that provides the essential underpinning for later development and success. The neurological hard-wiring necessary for language, interaction and reasoning is established at this stage, and it is not automatic: it depends on stimulating interaction from adults, older children and peers. And it's not a one-way process, simply transferring data from society into the mind of the infant.

In the sphere of citizenship education at this age, I want to raise two substantial points. The first is that we must provide a learning environment in which 'the infant' can participate in a variety of social groups – the family, friends, playgroups, and the like – so that the individual learns to how to interact with others, how to differentiate themselves and define her or his own identity. This is the critical period in which a sense of respect for themselves emerges, alongside respect for others. And one of the first identities achieved is as a member of a family group.

The second point to make is that this must be carried out in an environment that respects the rights of the child – as an individual, but also the special rights that attach to childhood. The infant is already a citizen, and must have this identity respected and protected.

These two elements are intimately inter-related. The way to encourage learning respect for others - tolerance, cooperation, the limits to competition - and the conceptual and behavioural social learning necessary for successful active citizenship, are best fostered in an environment that fully respects the rights of the child – indeed, it could be argued that such learning cannot truly be successful when such respect for young children's rights is absent. We can only teach diversity, tolerance and respect to these young people if we properly honour these qualities in our interactions with the young learner.

Taking into this our knowledge about early learning theories – the need to provide high levels of interactivity, to encourage experimentation, not just to allow for playfulness, but to constantly stimulate game-playing, testing – 'seeing what happens' – we can identify the need to educate those who live and work with infants about the importance of developing social interaction, of showing respect for the child, and encouraging the child to have respect for her or himself, and for developing social language, behaviour and understanding, and for achieving both a sense of autonomy and of community. This is no easy task, not least – because unlike many other learning contexts – it is a full-time operation. Infants are learning all the time, or at least all their waking time, which is, as parents will know, potential 24/7. So the citizenship learning needs of these young people, in the 'first age', are very great and demanding, and it is an area where we, in citizenship education, need to invest more time and attention. It seems that perhaps too much of the argument for early learning – or at least too much of its funding – is being driven by instrumental considerations of promoting the economic skills of numeracy and literacy. There is other early learning, in the social arena, which is even more critical for a successful society. And it is at this age that social differentiation – and social disadvantage – first become entrenched. Aspirations are vacuumed out of large numbers

of pre-school children, so that they neither expect to succeed in education or in life, and are – in effect – taught not to demand the facilities that would help them out of this.

Europe, and European citizenship, as concepts may not be on the horizon of the infant, but these pre-school children today need to be brought up within the context of a European human rights agenda, and a Europe that respects, protects and supports their aspirations and future.

**And then the whining school-boy, with his satchel
And shining morning face, creeping like snail
Unwillingly to school.**

The years of schooling – which I am taking here to be statutory education, which didn't exist in Shakespeare's day – also have a particularly critical place in the development of the active citizenship. New identities are added: that of a learner, of a member of a city and a country, as well as of social class and ethnicity. Schools are particularly potent social institutions, because they form such a dominant part of children's life. Unlike many other important institutions, they are the one to which all children attend, on a daily basis, for ten or more years of their lives. Such a pervasive, ubiquitous, long-standing contact inevitably will mould the attitudes, perceptions and behaviour of young people. So it is imperative that these institutions model and teach appropriate civic understanding and behaviour. This means it is essential that our schools are institutions that promote democratic behaviour, and that are rights-respecting schools. The only way to achieve active citizenship is to grow up and be educated in an institution in which

- Teachers and teaching assistants model rights-respecting behaviour: listening to and respecting pupils' views and opinions;
- Children have opportunities to feedback on what helps them learn and what they enjoy – we don't want children 'creeping like a snail unwillingly to school'.
- There is a strong emphasis on mutual support and collaboration
- Children have opportunities to make choices in their learning
- They are fully involvement in the assessment and evaluation
- Teachers use a variety of teaching strategies, responding to children's differing learning styles
- Children respect, support and value each other
- Every child has an equal opportunity to progress to the best of their ability
- Everyone uses the language of the Convention on the Rights of the Child regularly and consistently about a wide range of moral issues
- The Charter is used as a framework to ask questions about moral issues and issues of justice, consolidating understanding of human rights and wider moral and political issues.

Schools need to see that they promote social understanding that is based on respect for the individual. They also need to model democratic and civic processes – encouraging deliberation, participation, inclusion in rule-making. Social understanding requires enactive learning, as well as iconic and symbolic learning. And this means not simply

service learning, doing good works, but also understanding how rights have been established and maintained. Active citizenship means being involved in the extension and establishment of new rights.

These are things that schools are not necessarily good at. There are many models of education inimical to these ideas, and I suggest that the kind of social education that they provide is authoritarian, promotes obedience and compliance, rather than questioning and participation. How can we support schools to change towards such a model? What can universities and colleges do, in their training programmes for teachers, to inculcate citizenship and respect and rights?

European citizenship clearly has a place at this age. I have been, over the last four months¹, been talking to secondary school students about their views on how Europe might shape their identities – some 220 students so far, in five different countries. What has been striking has been both their insights and their volubility on the idea of Europe, and what it might bring to their futures. This energy and engagement (both for and against) needs to be welcomed and supported.

**.... Then the lover,
Sighing like furnace, with a woeful ballad
Made to his mistress' eyebrow.**

This third age I interpret to mean the young adult – in college, in training, perhaps in their first job. These are people now beginning to engage – or not – in the political process – the first-time voter, the novice participant. Yet another critical moment in life: how will these first encounters with the political system contribute to the shaping of their civic identities? New identities include those associated with the workplace, the university, and perhaps Europe.

Are our universities rights respecting? Do our workplaces support civic behaviour and development?

Perhaps this is another area that requires more attention and vigorous action. The institutions that young people encounter when they leave school are often very hierarchical, with great deference given to age and experience, and quite possibly showing rather limited respect for the rights of younger people. Gerontocratic power is inimical to respect for the individual, and inimical to the rights of the individual. It entrenches existing power and privilege, and tends to favour, in selection and promotion, those younger people who are more compliant to their elders, who look and behave their elders. Young people in their early twenties with greater civic confidence and better skills of articulation and deliberation, would be better able to hold their own in such contexts. Again, much may be being missed in the development of citizenship education at this age. This third age is more difficult to reach and identify: people at this stage in their lives are set on separate paths, following different careers and academic disciplines, different paths to adult life. They may need to be addressed, and they cannot be brought together in a single constituency. How, and where, can they be reached?

¹ See Ross, A. 'Border Crossings: Young Peoples' identities in a time of change', in this volume.

Perhaps a plurality of approach is necessary for this age with different strategies for the student, the young worker – and the young unemployed? Following the ideas of Comenius, outlined earlier, one way in universities and colleges might move would be to introduce courses for all – so the student might find that their courses included material on civic education, whatever their discipline – politics for the physicist and civics for the chemist? Or there could be more structural changes within the colleges, that required a student to participate, rather than simply making it possible? Reaching young workers and apprentices might be more problematic – and reaching the young unemployed even more so. Yet, it could be argued, those that do not go to college are more likely to be effectively disenfranchised than those who do go to college, while those who are in long-term unemployment are more likely to be excluded from civic processes than those in work.

European citizenship now becomes even clearer, but also more problematic. The evidence is that young people in this age are divided: the college student is polylingual, travelled in Europe, and aspires to travel and work across the continent; the less-well achieving young people have fewer opportunities to experience Europe, other than sometimes as migrant labourers. We need to work hard to create opportunities equivalent to the Erasmus mobility scheme for young workers.

**.... Then a soldier,
Full of strange oaths, and bearded like the pard,
Jealous in honour, sudden and quick in quarrel,
Seeking the bubble reputation
Even in the cannon's mouth.**

Not soldiers, but this age is perhaps the late twenties to early forties group. At this time, people's lives are becoming more differentiated, settling into more substantial and roles – and perhaps a particularly significant role, in terms of citizenship education – the role of parent.

Citizenship education is important and necessary at this age, to help people understand and operate effectively in these roles. Active citizenship requires people to be involved not only in the formal processes of participation, but also in the informal activities of a whole range of socio-political organisations – discussing, debating, deliberating with others. We might draw on the work of Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger in this area – the idea of learning communities of practice, in which newcomers are brought into participation through peripheral participation, in which they acquire the modalities and practices of the deliberative participation in these sorts of organisation, and gradually take on the more mainstream roles.

Parental education has a particular role to play in citizenship education. As we saw with the first age, the infant, the early establishment of social interaction is critical – and it is parents who are, necessarily, at the forefront of this. They are in the role of primary carers – but also need to be seen, and to see themselves, as primary educators. They are the essential support to early learning, particularly in the social sphere. One potential problem is that many people, when they see themselves in the role of a teacher, assume

stereotypical behaviour of how they imagine school teachers might operate (or how they think they ought to operate). So parent education about how they should, or could, help their very young children learn needs to be approached with some delicacy and circumspection.

What role does European citizenship have at this age? The social framework provided by Europe should provide the underpinning for all young adults, and young parents. The social legislation that is being harmonised across the continent provides important social and economic rights and support for such people, and needs perhaps to be more prominent and evident.

**... Then the justice,
In fair round belly with good capon lin'd,
With eyes severe and beard of formal cut,
Full of wise saws and modern instances;
And so he plays his part.**

This age is clearly about most of the readers of this paper: teachers, professors, educators - full of wise sayings and examples, dispensing wisdom and judicious commentary. What are the citizenship education needs of such a group of those who are experienced and powerful? Surely this is the group, at least so far, least in need of support in citizenship learning and identities?

Only to a point. This group, people of this age, are those at the peak of their careers, exercising as much power and influence as they are every likely to over their lifetime. The hegemonic power of the middle aged needs to be exercised with tact, discretion, and a degree of humility that we do not always display. This is the time of life when active citizens need to deploy new skills of counselling and mentoring, supporting younger generations in becoming active citizens, passing on and building up new patterns of social behaviour. As with the earlier ages that have been reviewed, this is not always a process that is done well. The description Shakespeare gives the justice suggests that many at this age are over-concerned with their own well-being - well fed, well dressed, and with a well-cut coiffeur. But the role he ascribes the justice is rather different – to draw on their experiences of the recent past, to draw on accumulated wisdom, to make ‘wise saws’ – considered advice and commentary – to the younger generations.

What can be done to support – to educate – this age in the responsibilities of the sage in civic education? There need to be better and more support schemes to encourage and sustain ways in which counselling and mentoring can be provided in a positive, but non-judgemental way. Too often older professionals seem to feel that their experience and position allow them to dictate – or try to dictate – to younger colleagues. In the realm of civic participation this is not just poor practice: it is positively counterproductive. There are a number of good examples of ways in which responsibilities and patterns of social practice can be passed on with due humility, and not with arrogance.

The European citizenship context may be particularly of interest in this. The Union and its institutions – populated largely by people of this age – has somewhat of a reputation

for instructing others as to their civic roles and duties. They do not provide a particularly good role model for offering counsel and advice.

The sixth age shifts

**Into the lean and slipper'd pantaloon,
With spectacles on nose and pouch on side;
His youthful hose, well sav'd, a world too wide
For his shrunk shank; and his big manly voice,
Turning again toward childish treble, pipes
And whistles in his sound.**

And so, retirement. In Shakespeare's day, not many people made this sixth age: most people died in harness. Shakespeare himself retired relatively early, but did not himself live long enough to become a lean and slipper'd pantaloon. But now, most of the working population of Europe will retire, and will have a period of retirement that lasts a long time, before they slip into age seven. And this provides particular issues for identity, education, and citizenship.

First, for identity. Despite the modern phenomena of multiple identities, where each individual has a repertoire of identities that they select and wear contingently, depending on location, context and time, one particular dominant identity that many people have is their work role. This identity of work is suddenly stripped from them on retirement, and for many this is a painful dislocation. It may not be the loss of salary, or the companions, or the workplace that matters, but the inability to describe to respond to the question 'what do you do?' There is clearly a task here, to provide sustaining roles for senior citizens – and here again, there's a role for Europe. CiCe's own Ann-Marie van der Dries has taken a lead here in citizenship terms, when she recently organised a Grundtvig programme on European Senior Citizens Parliament, recruiting a multinational set of retired people for a week-long course on the European Union and its institutions.

Education takes on a new flavour for this age. For the first time, education can be free of any instrumentalism: it is there to be enjoyed for its own sake, without any demand, requirement or suspicion that it should have some economic 'benefit'. Activities such as the University of the Third Age – voluntary, self-organised courses run by, run for, and taught by retired people exemplify this – free from the academic bureaucracy of courses, credits, modules, grades and certificates.

Citizenship, of course, continues, as does the need and duty to participate, and to continue to learn about current issues. Surveys suggest that older citizens are less likely to identify themselves as European citizens than younger people, but we do not yet know if this is a function of age – something one moves towards as one gets older – or a cohort effect, that will not be shown by today's younger people when they move to this sixth age. Citizenship education is still important: older people need to be included fully as citizens and seen as contributing to the common good.

**Last scene of all,
That ends this strange eventful history,**

**Is second childishness and mere oblivion;
Sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything.**

This is the age that Shakespeare himself didn't make. The cyclic, almost palindromic, nature of life is seen in this description of extreme old age as a second childhood.

And yet people at this age, in such conditions, are still citizens, and I suggest that we often seem to forget this in the way in which society treats many of those who are elderly and frail as non-persons. We need to think much more about how we ensure that the very old retain their civic rights and how they can be helped to exercise them.

And so I have tried to raise a series of questions about how we approach issues of citizenship education and of identity across all the stages of life, an approach to all of the stages of life. I have not given many answers to these questions, but have tried to identify some of the issues. Teasing out the different ages has enabled us to not just identify the weak spots, but also to note that there are citizenship education needs at every stage of life, for all manner and kinds of people. Addressing these needs is the challenge ahead.