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Extending the theory and practice of education for cosmopolitan citizenship

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Abstract

In 2003, citizenship education had recently been introduced to the national curriculum for England, and the model adopted was proving to be influential in a variety of settings worldwide. We sought to challenge a nationalist version of citizenship education by proposing 'education for cosmopolitan citizenship' (Osler and Starkey, 2003) arguing for citizenship learning founded in human rights, that recognises and builds upon cosmopolitan values at all scales. Building upon theories of cosmopolitan democracy (Held, 1997) we examined research data from young people living in communities characterized by diversity. We characterised them as emergent cosmopolitan citizens, who were negotiating daily their multiple loyalties and belongings. Nearly two decades later, many people are less optimistic about the global political climate. In the face of economic difficulties, demographic change and uncertainties, some welcome authoritarian and populist leaders whose rhetoric suggests easy solutions to complex problems, blaming the most vulnerable (e.g. refugees, foreigners) for society's ills. A politics of solidarity and hope is derided as those who have suffered the negative impact of globalization, economic crisis and austerity policies are urged to put 'our people' first. This paper examines various challenges confronting teachers who seek to educate young people for living together in democratic communities in which human rights, justice and peace prevail. We argue that education for human rights and cosmopolitan citizenship is more urgent than ever. Such an education can offer young people alternative narratives, empowering them to struggle for justice in their own lives and those of others.

Keywords: human rights education, nationalism, cosmopolitan citizenship, populism, social justice, migration, Islamophobia

Introduction

Teachers in 2017 are working in a difficult climate in which populist ideas threaten human rights and democracy. Globalization and migration are presented as threats; intolerance appears to flourish. Today, across Europe, several political leaders, notably from the far right, emphasise the need to put 'our people' first, and to 'take back control' from international organizations, such as the European Union. The need to teach for human

rights, human solidarity, peace and security in Europe has never been more urgent in any period since World War Two. Yet education policy frameworks rarely put human rights at the centre of education reforms (Osler, 2016).

In 1948, when the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) was proclaimed, education was placed at the heart of the human rights project. As we face a crisis of human rights and democracy in Europe, we consider *why* we need to give greater emphasis to human rights in schools and *how* we might ensure that human rights are placed at the heart of schooling. We reflect on the potential of 'education for cosmopolitan citizenship' founded in human rights (Osler and Starkey, 2003; Osler and Starkey, 2005) to contribute to learning to live together in communities that promote justice and peace. Importantly, we consider concrete ways in which teachers can contribute to the development of schools as just communities in which all learners can flourish.

We also discuss some dangers of education for an exclusive national citizenship, and consider why such education is inappropriate in a global age, where schools and communities are increasingly characterised by 'super-diversity' (Vertovec, 2007). We reassert the importance of education for cosmopolitan citizenship, that supports diversity at all scales, and that offers a means for strengthening democracy and enabling participation.

We conclude with some approaches that might be most effective in strengthening democracy through education, and transforming students' understandings of how they can be effective agents for change and social justice in their own communities, drawing on our more recent research and specifically on material from *Human rights and schooling: An ethical framework for teaching for social justice* (Osler, 2016).

Human rights and democratic citizenship in troubled times

We are living in difficult times. Some would suggest that we are living in dangerous times, since it is possible to draw several parallels between the current global economic/political climate and that of the 1920s and early 1930s. Are we in fact witnessing the Weimarization of Europe? The German Weimar Republic (1919-1933) was an experiment in democracy, in which cultural innovation and creativity at first flourished, with attempts made to create a fair, humane society. However, democracy proved fragile, with hyper-inflation and depression leading to conflict in which political violence and terrorism, racism, and antisemitism took hold. Processes of exclusion were set in train which eventually led to war and genocide.

The 2008 global financial crisis was the worst since 1929 and threatened the collapse of large financial institutions, only prevented by national governments bailing out ailing banks. In the case of several European Union (EU) countries, efforts to refinance national banks or repay/ refinance national debt were only possible with the assistance of the European Central Bank (ECB), the International Monetary Fund (IMF), or other Eurozone countries.

Across Europe, we have seen the growth of populist movements and far-right political parties. In Russia and certain Eastern European countries, it has been suggested that the transition to democracy has been shallow (Evans, 2011). In eastern Ukraine, following the 2014 Russian annexation of Crimea, some citizens, dependent on trade with Russia and experiencing the impact of austerity and economic hardship, have engaged in armed conflict with their government. In Hungary, the right-wing, populist government of Prime Minister Viktor Orban is hostile to refugees and has legitimized intolerance and Islamophobia. While Orban favours an 'authoritarian' style of government, critics, as reported on the BBC website, are concerned that a new 2012 constitution has weakened democratic checks and balances and strengthened the position of the ruling party. Citizens whose opinions differ from the government may grow cautious about asserting their views, and practise self-censorship. In such cases, it is relatively easy for authoritarian leaders to assert that democracy is not working, and to minimise public pressure on themselves.

2016 also saw two elections in which populist ideas caught the imagination of voters: the United Kingdom referendum on whether to remain or leave the EU and the US Presidential election. The UK referendum was instituted by a Prime Minister who hoped to appease the right-wing of his party, and who fully expected the electorate to vote to remain. The election took place with a prevailing anti-EU message: 'take back control' and in a much longer-term period of press hostility to EU. The result, requiring only a simple majority to vote leave, was just 48 percent voting to remain and 52 percent to leave. Populist, xenophobic messages initiated by the UK Independence Party were prominent in the Leave campaign. Immigration reporting was extremely negative: there were constant stories about immigrants 'sponging' off the welfare state, 'bleeding' the NHS dry, and of criminality (Berry, 2016). The effects of the 2008 financial crisis, coupled with the impact of government imposed austerity measures, were effectively linked in the popular imagination to 'them'. The long-term impact of the Brexit vote on the EU and on the UK remains unclear, yet the election result triggered an increase in reported hate crime, in which minoritized groups were targeted. Just nine months after this negative referendum campaign, Kurdish-Iranian teenage asylum-seeker Reker Ahmed was left with life-threatening injuries after several youths, some as young as 15 years, set upon him in a brutal attack as he stood waiting for a bus in Croydon, South London (Khomami, 2017). The attack has disturbing echoes of the racist murder of Stephen Lawrence in 1993. The murder led to official recognition of institutional racism in British society (Macpherson, 1999) which in turn spurred efforts to promote greater awareness of racist injustice through education and training programmes.

There are parallels between the UK referendum campaign and the 2016 US presidential election campaign, in which Republican candidate Donald Trump forthrightly adopted anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim rhetoric. Following his success, the US has also seen an upswing in reported hate crime linked to the divisive election campaign and

terrorism at home and abroad (Lichtblau, 2016), as well as a corresponding anxiety amongst vulnerable groups, notably Muslims, other religious minorities, and sexual minorities.

Concerns about the impact of globalization, especially the impact of migration (itself a result of both conflict and economic vulnerability) have been magnified by the global refugee crisis of 2015/2016, in which millions of people have found themselves displaced or forced to flee as a result of the ongoing war in Syria and other conflicts. Public support and readiness to meet the needs of vulnerable migrants and refugees is frequently undermined by populist arguments that present a choice between helping 'them' at the expense of 'our people', a theme that is likely to resonate at a time when austerity measures restrict access to public services and social security. Populist rhetoric links migrants to the threat of terror, so increasing anxiety and xenophobia.

Fear of terrorism prevails in the second decade of the twenty-first century. In 2016, Turkey saw frequently reoccurring terror attacks. President Recep Erdogan's immediate response to an attack in December 2016 was, the BBC's website reported, the arrest and detention of 235 people for acting on behalf of the outlawed Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), including 11 law-makers. These detentions follow other restrictions on citizens' rights, including a blanket withdrawal of the right to travel outside Turkey, applied to scholars and academics, and the sacking of senior university personnel across the country. While concerns about Islamist terror remain high on political agendas, it is worth remembering that 2011 saw one of the worst acts of violent extremism in Europe, in which 77 people in Norway died at the hands of a far-right, anti-Muslim, ethno-nationalist terrorist, who targeted children and young people (Osler and Lybaek, 2014).

In France, a 'temporary' state of emergency was declared following the November 2015 terror attacks that has been extended five times, to continue beyond the completion of the French presidential election process (April/May) until July 2017 (as reported in *The Guardian*, 14 December 2016). It is not clear that the state of emergency has enabled the authorities to guarantee greater security, yet fear of terror causes law-makers to restrict human rights in the name of security.

Challenges for teachers and schools

1 Super-diversity

The unprecedented number of refugees and migrants arriving in Europe in the second decade of the twenty-first century means that the whole continent now faces the reality of 'super-diversity' (Vertovec, 2007). Mass migration is no longer connected primarily to countries with former colonial territories. Today's migrants are drawn from a wider geographical range, with significant numbers migrating from Eastern and Central Europe to Western Europe. This impels a European-wide review of political and social policy responses, and corresponding awareness-raising and educational initiatives which encourage critical examination of migration. Importantly, migration needs to be understood as part of the human condition: people have always migrated looking for work and a better

future, when resources such as water and food are scarce, and when conflict threatens security. One urgent need is for policy-makers to move from seeing migrants as a problem to recognizing them as an asset, particularly in a region such as Europe, with an aging demographic.

Migration patterns mean that students in schools across Europe are frequently not nationals of the country in which they are being educated. Teaching for citizenship and human rights must address the needs of a diverse group of students who hold multiple and (often) flexible identities (Ong, 1999). A small proportion will be transnationals: such students are moving for a relatively short period of time to the country where their parents are working, often in well-paid professional roles. Others are longer-term migrants who have a citizenship status that works for them: EU citizens migrating from one member-state to another are typically in this category. Such students rarely aspire to be nationals of the country in which they are living, since their status as EU citizens guarantees their rights in their new country of residence. Economic migrants from other regions of the world are likely to aspire to become nationals of the country to which they have moved, as are refugees and stateless persons.

In responding to super-diversity, teachers are increasingly recognising that traditional forms of citizenship learning which emphasize and privilege the nation-state and national citizenship are inappropriate and outdated (Osler, 2011). Citizenship education founded in human rights offers an alternative approach, since all students, regardless of their nationality and migration status, are holders of human rights. Teaching for citizenship needs to recognise many students and their families will gain citizenship status (nationality) by residence, rather than by descent. Governments, teachers and school curricula need to recognise both these means of becoming a national as equally valid.

2 Addressing Islamophobia and new forms of racism

Public debates about diversity, integration and multiculturalism in European contexts, often include the role of education in promoting national identity and citizenship on the one hand, and solidarity between people within and beyond the nation on the other. Disturbingly, within such debates, Islam is frequently presented as the limiting case for multiculturalism (Osler, 2009), and either implicitly or explicitly, as in tension with European values, so-called national values, or even Christian values. Effectively, this serves to undermine freedom of religion.

Public anxieties are fuelled by neoconservative and cultural conservative voices from within political and cultural elites. Such sources do not support the notion of a conspiracy to Islamize Europe, but their arguments are used by conspiracy theorists to justify their stance and sometimes violent actions (Feteke, 2012). Within this climate, it is difficult to secure recognition of Islamophobia as a form of cultural racism, posing a threat to a secure, inclusive and human rights-orientated Europe.

As the attack on asylum-seeker Reker Ahmed (discussed above) reveals, it is the term 'asylum-seeker' itself, once associated with the legitimate process of seeking refuge from human rights violations, that has not only become a term of racist abuse amongst certain groups (Osler, 2017; Rutter, 2005) but effectively one where some see it as legitimate to engage in violent hate crime.

This challenge, of addressing multiculturalism and national identity in education, is further complicated by political debate about the EU's future, provoked by the growing influence of far-right parties in European politics; and by the UK's Brexit vote. A space has opened in which the question: 'Is it possible for diverse people to live together peaceably?' has become a legitimate question, which far-right groups are exploiting for their own ends.

3 Securitization of education

Austerity measures are having a direct impact on children's lives, undermining their social, economic, cultural and political rights. For example, official data indicated that 3.9 million children were living in relative poverty in the United Kingdom in 2014-15. Two thirds of these children live in households where at least one adult is in work (Monaghan, 2016). Children's political rights are also under threat, because of measures aimed at preventing violent extremism. In response to concerns about terror, the British government has published guidance for schools in England on 'promoting fundamental British values' (DFE, 2014).

Within this guidance there is emphasis on democracy, the rule of law, freedom of belief, and mutual respect, but no mention of equality, justice, or the concept of human rights or children's human rights. The teaching of these so-called British values must take place within the statutory curriculum framework of promoting students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, since the initiative to promote citizenship education in schools in England, introduced in 2000, has been so marginalised and down-graded as to have disappeared from the curriculum of a significant proportion of schools. The emphasis is on developing a sense of national identity and of naming certain values as 'British' when they generally reflect agreed international standards. Schooling, which should be about extending the range of learners' identities, focuses here on the national at the expense of other identities. Those who do not hold British citizenship may well feel excluded and marginalized.

A concurrent development, the UK government's Prevent programme, presented initially as a community-led approach to tackling violent extremism (DCLG, 2007) has, according to Kundani (2009), come to define relationships between government and Muslim communities. The UK Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015 s26 imposed on local authorities, schools, and social services, a duty to have due regard to the need to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism. While efforts to prevent terrorism are essential, these measures may have unintended consequences of alienating the very young people they seek to protect, and undermining their human rights. Schools and other bodies must

refer those they believe to be vulnerable to the police, who decide whether to refer them to a panel ('Channel') on which local authority and police representatives sit, to prepare 'support packages' to reduce their vulnerability. There is no legal duty to seek parents' or guardians' consent before a child comes before the panel. If parents refuse, this may be grounds for judging the child at risk, leading to the potential removal of the child from the family. Some 900 child referrals took place in the period 2012-2015. Of 796 referrals in June-August 2015, 312 (39%) were children (Webber, 2016). Multiple cases of how the Prevent agenda impacts on children and their schools are documented (Webber, 2016). The ways in which this duty, imposed on schools, negatively impacts on children's political rights and on relationships between teachers and children have also been discussed (Coppock, 2014; Osler, 2017). The Prevent agenda is likely to inhibit children's and young people's freedom of speech at an age when they are developing their thinking: 'There is a danger that school, a place where learners should have opportunities to discuss ideas and explore opinions, becomes one where students, particularly those of Muslim heritage, may be reluctant to express themselves' (Osler, 2017).

Learning for cosmopolitan citizenship

We have sought to highlight how we are living in troubled times and that, in this context, certain educational initiatives which focus on national citizenship, or on combating terror and violent extremism, may at best be misguided and, at worst, are likely to contribute to the processes of exclusion that threaten cohesive societies. We now return to the possibilities of 'education for cosmopolitan citizenship' (Osler and Vincent, 2002; Osler and Starkey, 2003, 2005) in contributing to preparing young people to live together in increasingly diverse societies in which they feel empowered to make a difference. We suggest that when young people are equipped with the skills for political efficacy *and* the chance to practice those skills, we are more likely to be able to build cohesive societies and a more peaceful world. Strategies that focus on equipping students with such skills are urgently needed in an age of uncertainty and political disillusionment.

As we have noted: 'Education for citizenship is one response to the political and social realities of globalisation' and can 'provide the mechanism for transmitting the core shared values on which just and peaceful democratic societies may be built' (Osler and Starkey, 2003, 243). Yet for this mechanism to be effective, citizenship teaching and learning needs to build on young people's experiences, and in our global age, not have a unique focus of loyalty to a nation-state. In proposing the concept of 'education for cosmopolitan citizenship' we advocate citizenship learning that builds theories of cosmopolitan democracy (Held, 1997); that recognizes our complex, interconnected world; and draws on young people's experiences of living in communities characterized by diversity, in which they negotiate multiple loyalties and belongings. Teachers do not have to ask their students to choose between local and national priorities on one hand and global concerns on the

other. It is possible to prepare young people for interdependence and diversity at all scales: in the school community, neighbourhood, town or city, nation, and globe.

Citizens today need more than formal access to the public sphere and to decision-making processes. They also need to understand the complex ways in which they can claim (or be denied) access to public resources and acquire the know-how to engage in political processes. When people feel excluded from these processes, they lose trust in elected representatives and in the political class.

The shape of political communities has shifted in response to forces of globalization. More than ever, we have an intensely connected global economy, highly integrated global financial systems, and multinational companies dominating national and international transactions. In environmental politics, human rights, international law and security, and social media, people feel more closely connected than ever before. In this context, students need to understand the multifaceted patterns of economic factors, cultural processes, and social movements that shape their lives. Teachers need to devise programmes of study that help students acquire skills to engage in new and changing forms of politics.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) 1989 has had a direct impact on policy-making in relation to children. In particular, the concept of the child's 'best interest' needs to be taken into consideration on policy-making related to children's education and social welfare. Article 12 guarantees the child the right to express his or her views freely 'in all matters affecting the child' and for these views to be 'given due weight' in decision-making processes (UN, 1989). Schools and other agencies serving children have an obligation to confirm to such standards and governments the responsibility to ensure them.

Local authorities and local government leaders have an important role to play in enabling such an education. First, it is important to give students opportunities to play a role in political processes at the local level, and for students, including the youngest, to have a voice in decision-making processes that affect them.

Teachers need the support of guidance and training that enables them to conform to such standards in their everyday work. One starting point for such training is the CRC and the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Education and Training (UN, 2011). Human rights education is helpfully defined in this latter document as encompassing learning *about* rights, *through* rights and *for* rights. As well as knowledge (learning *about* rights) there is an emphasis on learning *through* rights (democratic upbringing and school practices, such as student councils and a climate that promotes recognition and respect of difference). Finally, there is learning *for* rights. This involves empowering young people to be able to make a difference, and equipping them with skills for change. It involves seeing human rights education as a means of transformation (Osler and Starkey, 1996, 2010; Osler, 2016). In this way both teachers and students become agents for change, contributing to a more just society. At their core, human rights can be understood as 'an expression of the human urge to resist oppression' (Osler, 2016). When human rights and human rights

education is seen through this lens its universal power and relevance becomes apparent. It is necessarily about supporting students to name inequality, challenge injustice, make a difference, and develop solidarities at local, national and global levels

Schools and teachers are frequently constrained by curricula and examination demands, and need to be encouraged and supported in developing appropriate curricula. Local authorities can publicise and promote good practice in teaching for cosmopolitan citizenship. Another local authority contribution is to encourage the employment of teachers from diverse backgrounds, including those who themselves have experience of migration. Such teachers can help extend existing curricula and extend the narratives beyond those presented in standard text books (Osler, 2017).

Schools cannot teach for cosmopolitan citizenship alone. They are reliant on various partners, including museums and other local institutions. Museums often work with schools to extend the curriculum so that students are able to build on their personal experiences and family histories, ensuring that new and inclusive collective histories reflect diverse local, national and global perspectives. Local authorities can support museums and other local organisations in guaranteeing students' 'right to narrate' (Bhabha, 2003).

Most importantly, local authorities can develop projects to ensure students have opportunities to learn about their human rights, in line with their obligations under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989. Education for cosmopolitan citizenship is founded on human rights, encouraging students to build solidarities at all scales from the local to the global. Teachers and students need support when they challenge initiatives such as those described above, concerning securitization, which threaten students' political rights. Listening to the needs of students, and their teachers, is a first step in offering support for a curriculum that aims to extend young people's identities and equip them with the skills to work for greater justice. Some fifteen years after we articulated our first thoughts on the theory and practice of education for cosmopolitan citizenship in *Educational Review*, the need for learners to explore the possibilities for living together peacefully and equitably in communities characterised by diversity seems more urgent than ever.

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