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Education for cosmopolitan citizenship: A framework for language learning

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Abstract

Education for citizenship and the promotion of language learning for intercultural communication are both responses to globalisation. This article introduces an approach to citizenship education we call education for cosmopolitan citizenship which is explicitly linked to human rights principles and standards. Rather than focussing on differences and cultural barriers to be overcome, education for cosmopolitan citizenship starts from our common humanity. Teachers are professionals who should ground their actions and judgements in the normative standards of human rights law such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). This provides a language for identifying and naming injustices and discriminations and enables dialogue across difference. Rather than having a primary sense of belonging focused on membership of a nation-state, education for cosmopolitan citizenship accepts that learners celebrate multiple identities and loyalties. The article concludes with some practical examples of how this perspective is implemented in language classrooms.

Keywords: human rights, child rights, intercultural education, globalization, social justice.

Resumen

Tanto la educación para la ciudadanía como el desarrollo del aprendizaje de lenguas para la comunicación intercultural constituyen respuestas a la globalización. Este artículo presenta un enfoque de educación para la ciudadanía que llamamos educación para la ciudadanía cosmopolita y que se vincula explícitamente con parámetros y principios de derechos humanos. En lugar de focalizar la atención en las diferencias y las barreras culturales y su superación, la educación para la ciudadanía cosmopolita tiene como punto de partida nuestra humanidad compartida. Los docentes son profesionales que deberían sustentar sus juicios y acciones en los parámetros normativos de la ley en derechos humanos como la Convención Internacional sobre los Derechos del Niño de las Naciones Unidas. Este documento brinda un lenguaje para identificar y nombrar injusticias y discriminaciones y posibilita el diálogo a través de la diferencia. En lugar de contar con un sentido de pertenencia preponderante centrado en la identificación con una nación-estado, la educación para la ciudadanía cosmopolita acepta que los estudiantes abrazan múltiples identidades y lealtades. El artículo concluye con algunos ejemplos prácticos sobre cómo implementar esta perspectiva en el aula de lenguas.

Palabras clave: ciudadanía intercultural; criticidad; acción en la comunidad.

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EDUCATION FOR CITIZENSHIP and the promotion of language learning for intercultural communication are both responses to the political and social realities of globalization. There are, however, many understandings of citizenship and of citizenship education. Michael Byram has argued that the utilitarian aims of language teaching can potentially be fulfilled by theoretical and practical interaction with education for citizenship, for *intercultural citizenship*. The proposal is that language teachers would explicitly draw on citizenship education "enriching it with attention to intercultural communicative competence" (Byram, 2010, p. 320). Here we argue that intercultural communicative competence is important but insufficient if it is simply allied to a minimal version of citizenship education. Instead, we advocate an approach to citizenship education we call *education for cosmopolitan citizenship* (Osler & Starkey, 2003, 2005a) which addresses citizenship at a range of scales and which is explicitly linked to human rights principles and standards. This paper is an initial brief response to the assertion that "citizenship education in the foreign language classroom …could benefit from a human rights framework that sees students as individuals with agency, who are willing and able to be engaged in struggles for justice in their local contexts" (Porto, 2014, p. 14).

Education for Cosmopolitan Citizenship

Citizenship education needs to address learners' identities and to promote and develop skills for communication and participation. Teachers of languages and of citizenship need to promote respect for diversity and the development of a range of critical skills, including skills of "intercultural evaluation" (Hall, 2000, p. 49). Hall's term implies the necessity for intercultural dialogue to be grounded in some normative standards that allow for evaluative judgements to be made. This involves more than intercultural communication. All of us are making some kind of judgement or evaluation when we encounter a new cultural context, whether this positioning is acknowledged or not. Consequently intercultural education should include consideration of stance, and a process of self- reflection and self-evaluation, so that both teachers and learners are conscious of this process. As Figueroa puts it:

> Pluralism does not mean a radical relativism. That would be self-defeating. One must stand somewhere. It is not possible to stand nowhere. But neither is an attempt to stand everywhere tenable (Figueroa, 2000, p. 55).

We have argued that teachers have a professional obligation to ground their actions and judgements in the normative standards and principles of international human rights law (Osler, 2010; Osler & Starkey, 2010). Human rights instruments such as

the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) 1948 and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) 1989 provide a language for identifying and naming injustices and discriminations, as well as an emphasis on the entitlement of all human beings to dignity and equality of rights. They provide us with a set of principles in which it is possible to have a dialogue across difference (Osler, 2016) and in a classroom setting "can help ensure that all voices are recognized and all points of view are considered" (Banks et al., 2005, p. 12).

Citizenship education promoted by national governments generally aims to promote integration into a set of pre-defined national norms (Osler, 2011; Reid, Gill & Sears, 2010). However, in a globalising world, national frames of reference, whilst important, may not be accepting of the wide range of identities to which people aspire (Osler, 2015a, 2015b). We therefore propose education for cosmopolitan citizenship which we define as a *status* deriving from equal entitlement to human rights. It is based on a *feeling* of belonging and recognition of diversity across a range of communities from the local to the global. It is a *practice* involving negotiation, equitable resolution of differences and work with others to promote freedom, justice and peace within and between communities (Osler & Starkey, 2005a).

Rather than having a unique or primary sense of belonging focused on membership of a nation-state, education for *cosmopolitan* citizenship accepts that learners celebrate multiple identities as well as loyalties and belongings at a range of scales, such as those relating to families, neighbourhoods, cities, nations and continents, or, indeed at the global level, to their fellow humanity. Our research demonstrates that learners' affiliations may well be transnational, including religious, political and cultural dimensions (Osler, 2010; Osler & Starkey, 2003). In multicultural settings, human rights principles and standards provide a framework for dialogue.

Rather than focussing on differences and cultural barriers to be overcome, education for cosmopolitan citizenship starts from our common humanity and a consequent understanding that all human beings are entitled to be considered as *us*. Human rights instruments are based on the premise that all human beings have equal entitlement to dignity and to human rights.

Education for cosmopolitan citizenship is conceptualised, not as an alternative to national citizenship education, nor, as has sometimes been interpreted, as a synonym for global citizenship education. As Charles Taylor argues: "we have no choice but to be cosmopolitans and patriots, which means to fight for the kind of patriotism that is open to universal solidarities against other, more closed, kinds" (1996, p.121). This requires that we re-imagine the nation as cosmopolitan (Osler, 2005, 2011) and that we re-conceptualise education for national citizenship so that it meets more adequately the needs of contemporary nation-states and the global community (Osler & Starkey, 2010).

It demands we acknowledge there are many ways of being Argentinian, Australian, Brazilian, British, Canadian, Japanese, Mexican, Singaporean, and so on.

Citizenship, therefore, does not necessarily require a deep love of country; it requires minimally a commitment to the polity. It is policy and legislative frameworks designed to promote greater social justice and remove barriers to full participative citizenship which will allow individuals to develop affective ties to the nation. Efforts by nation-states to promote national identity and affinity through education, in response to perceived threats, risk unintended outcomes, provoke concerns about propaganda, and threaten, rather than secure, social cohesion and democratic participation.

Many young people and adults do not identify primarily or exclusively with the nation state but have flexible and shifting identities (Mitchell & Parker, 2008; Osler, 2010; Osler & Starkey, 2003). In fact, the "principle of each individual being a citizen of just one nation-state no longer corresponds with reality for millions of people who move across borders and who belong in various ways in multiple places" (Castles, 2004, p.18). At all levels, national, region, global and especially at the local level, education for cosmopolitan citizenship responds to the realities of learning to live together and to develop a dialogue with those whose perspectives are different from our own. Education for cosmopolitan citizenship recognises these realities and offers an alternative way of re-conceptualising education for citizenship in our globalised world and globalised communities.

Both the UDHR and the CRC define the purposes of education. The UDHR states that:

> Education shall be directed to ...the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace (Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 26.2).

The CRC is more detailed and includes the following aims for education:

- The development of respect for the child's parents, his or her own cultural identity, language and values, for the national values of the country in which the child is living, the country from which he or she may originate, and for civilisations different from his or her own;
- The preparation of the child for responsible life in a free society, in the spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance, equality of sexes, and friendship among all peoples, ethnic, national and religious groups

> and persons of indigenous origin (United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 29 c, d).

There can be no doubt, given the voluntary but binding commitment of governments to the CRC, that there is, in principle, universal agreement about the importance of human rights education. Language education is clearly a significant opportunity to help learners develop "respect for ...civilisations different from his or her own" and "friendship among all peoples".

However, people ignorant of their rights cannot claim their rights and so human rights education can be seen as an enabling right and an essential component of citizenship education. Citizens may be defined as those able to exercise their rights and responsibilities in a democratic society and in order to exercise their rights they must be familiar with them and understand the scope and the limitations of their rights.

The UN Declaration on Human Rights Education and Training (UN General Assembly, 2011) further encourages member states to promote HRE. The Declaration provides three perspectives on HRE. The first emphasises that human rights are embedded in international law and so HRE involves: "providing knowledge and understanding of human rights norms and principles, the values that underpin them and the mechanisms for their protection". In summary this is education about human rights.

The second perspective addresses educational structures, young people's experiences of schooling, and the implications of HRE for pedagogy. It emphasises "learning and teaching in a way that respects the rights of both educators and learners". This is referred to as education through human rights.

Thirdly HRE aims to be transformatory. Education for human rights "includes empowering persons to enjoy and exercise their rights and to respect and uphold the rights of others".

HRE is an interdisciplinary project that provides a framework for conceptualising the aims, processes and practices of education. Whilst it is helpful for teachers to have some understanding of international human rights law, there are more practical implications for educational communities. These include attention to the curriculum and school structures and the inclusion of participatory student-centred methodologies. Planning for HRE should include engaging with young people's current experiences of schooling and human rights in school. Whilst the intention is learning to live together, schools may also be places of violence, discrimination and exclusion.

Practical Implications for Language Teachers

Language teaching and learning have aims that go beyond the merely instrumental. Language learning, even for business purposes, is part of a humanistic education that

encourages intercultural communication on the basis of equality. However, we argue for an explicit human rights frame of reference (Osler & Starkey, 2005b). Without this, comparisons between cultures, both within the learning group and between the learners and the target culture may be the occasion for stereotypes, racist or sexist comments or jokes and derogatory remarks. These contradict the spirit of human rights, which is to be respectful of others. Stereotyping also negates the aims of education in general and of language learning in particular. A knowledge and understanding of human rights equips teachers and learners to engage with other cultures on the basis of equality of dignity.

> Adopting a human rights approach to language teaching provides a sound framework within which controversial issues can be examined. Debate is conducted showing respect for persons, particularly other interlocutors, as the essential dignity of human beings is acknowledged. Disparaging remarks about individuals or groups who are not present is also inappropriate behaviour and therefore unacceptable. On the other hand, if respect for human rights is regarded as a standard, judgements can be made about the words or actions of individuals, governments or cultural groups. In this way uncritical cultural relativism can be avoided. This perspective needs to be made explicit to the learners from the start and one way of addressing this is the study of human rights instruments in the target language. Such a study enables students to link the various topics they study to wider issues of human rights and is likely to prove interesting and popular (Starkey 1996 p.108).

The pedagogy associated with language learning provides many opportunities to develop citizenship skills as well as familiarise learners with key concepts associated with democracy. In many respects communicative methodology is in itself democratic. The skills developed in language classes are thus directly transferable to citizenship education (Osler & Starkey, 2005). In particular the language class is a site where education for dialogue is especially developed including skills such as the ability to listen, to reformulate the words of another the better to understand them, to put a different point of view, to produce a valid argument, to concede the strengths of someone else's position or perspective.

In the communicative language classroom learners are often required to speak and discuss in pairs and groups, having the freedom to express their own opinions and develop ideas and new ways of thinking. This contribution to the overall project of democratic citizenship can also be recognised and developed. Since discussion and debate require working with others, taking part in public discourse and working to

resolve conflicts, language teaching can contribute substantially to capacities for action and social competencies.

Whether the context is pair work, group work or discussions involving the whole class, teachers taking a human rights position insist on ground rules. This can help to ensure that expressions of opinion and conflicts of views are productive and not destructive. Examples of such ground rules include:

- Where a discussion is chaired, the authority of the chair is respected.
- Even heated debates must be conducted in polite language.
- Discriminatory remarks, particularly racist, sexist and homophobic discourse and expressions are totally unacceptable at any time.
- Participants show respect when commenting on and describing people portrayed in visuals or texts.
- All involved have the responsibility to challenge stereotypes.
- A respectful tone is required at all times.

It goes without saying that teachers are party to these agreements and will not use sarcasm, irony and disparaging judgements.

A move away from closed and true/false questions in reading and listening comprehension, to open-ended questions where opinions are genuinely sought and discussed can also invigorate language classes. When language teachers create a communication gap to provide for a more meaningful task, they should also try to encourage students to explore their differences of opinions as well as merely exchange information. Questioning by the language teacher and questions printed in textbooks may focus on language structures rather than on the truth. For example, one French course we examined asked students to manipulate a sentence to illustrate sequence of tenses following *if*. Starting from the given sentence: 'On the whole, if immigrant families speak French they adapt more easily to their new life', students were expected to produce the following sentences:

- In years to come, if immigrant families speak French they will adapt more easily to their new life.
- Historically, if immigrant families spoke French they adapted more easily to their new life.
- Most people think that if immigrant families spoke French they would adapt more easily to their new life.
- If immigrant families had spoken French on arrival, they would have adapted more easily to their new life. (Starkey & Osler, 2001, our

translation)

Although these sentences are correct grammatically, the exercise clearly reinforces the view that immigrant families are inadequate and that in particular they are handicapped by lack of linguistic skills. In fact many families who come to settle in another country are bilingual. The exercise, suggesting a generalised language deficit, is thus misleading.

Although the course intended to present France in a positive light as a multicultural society, this example shows how the linguistic exploitation of the course material may counteract its socio-cultural objectives. The linguistic and cultural dimensions are meant to reinforce each other rather than one undermining the other. It would be quite possible to produce the same linguistic task whilst emphasising the capacities of the newcomers rather than their inadequacies. For instance the starting point could be: If French people are welcoming, immigrant families adapt more easily to their new life.

Given the observance of ground rules and a climate of open debate with respect for other speakers, it is very much in the interests of the language teacher to promote controversy in the classroom. In debating issues that are meaningful to themselves and about which there are genuine differences of view, learners develop their linguistic fluency as they focus on the content of the debate rather than on the form of the language they are using.

Conclusion

In this article we have introduced the concept of education for cosmopolitan citizenship, showing how it is grounded in commitments expressed in international human rights instruments. We have stressed the importance of human rights education as an enabling right for young people and as an indispensable component of the training of teachers of languages and intercultural communication. A human rights perspective is cosmopolitan in focussing on similarities between human beings rather than on differences. This way of looking at the world can and should have an impact on the conduct and content of language education. Language learning can be reframed as an intercultural rather than an international experience.

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