Pedagogies of agonistic democracy and global citizenship education

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Introduction and theoretical framework

The aim of this paper is to explore the possibilities of agonistic educational practices as a way to educate a critical global citizenry. This paper is based on empirical work conducted in the UK involving primary, undergraduate and postgraduate students, educators, and researchers. We invited these groups to an interactive workshop to discuss global citizenship. In devising the workshop, we drew on the work of Ruitenberg (2009) and her application of Mouffe (1999) in attempting to promote an agonistic approach to democratic education. Activities aimed at foregrounding conflict and destabilising consensus. In this paper, we critically reflect on the workshops and consider pedagogical contributions to a critical approach to global citizenship.

Educating for Global Citizenship (EfGC) has been a priority in the UK since the turn of the 21st century. Research by Marshall (2009, 2011) found that two key agendas for global citizenship have framed educational activities in the UK: a) preparing students with specific work skills to be competitive in the global market, and b) promoting emotional and empathetic connections to issues of social justice. However, her research also showed that in practice, there is a false dichotomy in that, despite good intentions, neither approach significantly engaged with the roots of inequalities locally or globally and hierarchical positions of power remained unchallenged. Building from this critique, a significant amount of scholarship has promoted a "critical" approach to EfGC (e.g., Andreotti, 2006; Lapayese, 2003; Swanson & Pashby, 2016). Further, the new United Nations Sustainable Development Goals include educating for global citizenship. As all UN signatories are required to respond to the SDGs, there is a particular importance of mobilizing a critical approach in the UK. UNESCO (2015) has produced materials to support the mainstreaming of EfGC, with key aims including "develop values of fairness and social justice, and skills to critically analyse inequalities…" (p. 16). Thus, given these trends in scholarship and practice, there is a call for an approach that engages with rather than glosses over the complex relations of power at the heart of what it means to relate to others as citizens. This is, indeed, a central imperative for democratic education (Sant, Lewis, Delgado & Ross, In Press).

There is a question, however, regarding how 'democratic education' can be defined. For those defending deliberative forms of democracy (Habermas, 1984; Gutman, 1987), democracy can be understood as creating spaces in which power relations are neutralized and ideal speech situations can emerge (Habermas, 1984; Kapoor, 2013). Democratic education in this sense aims to facilitate these neutral spaces and educate students into conflict resolution practices (Ewert, 1991). In contrast, those defending agonistic and conflictual forms of democracy (Mouffe, 1999; Laclau, 2007; Ranciere, 2006) argue conflict and power relations can never be neutralized. Power and antagonism are ineradicable, and democracy is "an unstable and volatile element which deals in disruption and

conflict rather than stability and consensus" (McDonnell, 2014, p. 50). Further, 'agonism' understood as engaging with antagonism and disagreement is essential to democratic politics (Mouffe, 1999). Democratic education is not centred on conflict resolution but rather on the "creation and maintenance of political channels for the expression of agonistic conflict" (Ruitenberg, 2009, p. 274). In this respect, democracy is understood as being essentially educative in itself (Biesta, 2006).

In this research, we draw upon conflict-centric theories of democracy (Mouffe, 1999; Laclau, 2007; Ranciere, 2006) and the later development of these theories in the field of education (Biesta, 2006; Ruitenberg, 2009). We consider the extent to which the workshops created spaces for agonistic and conflictual democratic education by foregrounding conflict in discussing issues of global citizenship and explore pedagogical possibilities.

Methodology

The workshop on global citizenship took place in a higher education institution in England. Forty-four participants were involved. The participants included (1) local primary students, national and international students of education studies in (2) undergraduate and (3) postgraduate courses, (4) invited researchers, (5) invited educators including teachers and curriculum developers and (6) the researchers signing this paper. Participants were invited via professional networks. The sample did not attempt to be representative. Rather, we present this project as an exploratory project that would need to be further examined for more conclusive results.

The purpose of the workshop was to generate an agonistic space in which ideas on global citizenship were discussed. The participants were organized in seven mixed tables of discussion. Each table included, at least, one representative of each of the groups previously described. In each table, one of the researchers led the discussion. The researchers presented to their tables' participants seven statements for discussion.

The researcher read aloud the statement and participants were immediately required to demonstrate their agreement or disagreement with the statement using an agree/disagree card provided to each of the participants. In each table, two sub-groups were created: those who agreed and those who disagreed. Each sub-group developed at least two arguments to support their views. These arguments were later presented to the other sub-group. Participants then engaged in a discussion on the statement. After an average of fifteen minutes discussion, participants were required to move to the following statement. No attempt to reach consensus was promoted and the researcher was actively involved in the discussion.

The discussion on the tables was followed by a plenary. This involved representatives from each table sharing one of the collective statements that had been written to reflect participants' thinking on one or more of the statements. The whole group were then asked to hold up their cards to express agreement or disagreement with the statement.

Data was collected through different data collection strategies. During the activity, two research assistants conducted observations and collected data through field notes and photographs. At the end of the activity, all the participants were required to provide an oral or written account of their experience. Six months later, participants were required to provide an additional written reflection of the event. Data was analysed following Laclau and Mouffe's discourse analysis as described by Jörgensen and Phillips (2002).

Provisional results

Our results suggest that each table of discussion generated very different dynamics. These dynamics seemed particularly influenced by the roles undertaken by the older participants. At some tables, the older participants (researchers, educators and HE students) took a consensual approach. Interestingly, in these cases, the younger participants (primary students) were more likely to take partisan positions and the adults, rather than the children, encouraged consensual decisions. In the other tables, some of the older participants reported having to make efforts to avoid consensus. One of us explained, "I had to make an effort to counter-argue one of the kid's ideas". In brief, young participants seemed to feel more comfortable dealing with conflict.

Our results suggest there was an intrinsically conflictual orientation in our discussions of global citizenship. On those tables in which the focus was on keeping some sort of consensus, the discussion moved towards other issues. In one of the tables, for instance, the initial debate on the statement 'In a better world, everybody would have the same resources' led to agreement on the issue of tax evasion. Rather than focusing on discussing issues on global citizenship that had initially generated political adversaries, participants felt more comfortable moving towards common ground. On the tables in which participants did not attempt to reach agreement, the debate ended with participants demonstrating competing understandings on the notions of 'citizenship' and 'globalization'. Our findings suggest rich possibilities for incorporating more agonistic and conflictual approaches in global citizenship education.

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