

Student Teachers' Perception of Citizenship Education at a Fiji Teachers' College

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Introduction

Farouk and Husin (2011, p. 154) state that it is important that students 'internalise that democracy is not a spectator's sport and consequently value active citizenship as an indispensable element in public life'. This statement makes particular mention in the chapter and congruent with the author's belief of how citizenship education and notions involving values should be taught. It advocates active participation, and experience-oriented teaching-learning methods for citizenship education and civic responsibility, than passive teaching-learning processes. As various fundamental principles of democratic life are being threatened both on a national and international scale, education is increasingly being expected to provide the response and possible answers. Teachers and teacher education then become crucial elements to citizenship education, which may include the focus of teacher education courses and perhaps vitally, the characteristics of teachers themselves. This paper incorporates (Xiao & Tong's, 2010, p. 45) definition of citizenship education as 'any educational experience that promotes the growth of individuals in regard to their civic capacities'. This study aims to investigate why student teachers think citizenship education is important, how it needs to be implemented, and what contents they perceive to be core to citizenship education. It is based on a survey conducted at a Teachers' College in Suva, Fiji, involving 35 participants. It will be referred to as Teachers College X hereafter.

The Importance of Citizenship Education

In order of priority, the first four reasons given by student teachers of Teachers' College X as to why citizenship education is important, are to develop responsible citizens, and enable children to make correct decisions. They also raised the need to develop students holistically (heart, hand and heard), and help students to be better and fruitful citizens in the future. Year 1 student teachers of Teachers' College X saw that citizenship education is important in allowing students to make informed personal choices and educative decisions. As the world goes through a period increasingly characterised by turbulence, civic capacity becomes an imperative need. Facing a future of uncertainty requires active and informed citizens who can make correct and educative decisions over social, political and economic lives. Therefore, Kennedy (2000, p. 23) emphasises that 'the development of citizens who can discern and make correct judgements about appropriate courses of civic action is the single most important priority for our societies in the new century'. The

new century needs citizens who can evaluate alternative courses of action, develop strategies, think and act appropriately in the public interest.

Student teachers of Teachers' College X also recognise the importance of personal development, one that is holistic and builds responsible citizens. Students of Teachers' College X further stress fruitful participation by students and young people in the future. Young people can participate in society in the future but they should also be seen to be able to participate vigorously in society now and today. The idea of 'future citizenship' should be challenged. Ignoring the youth, as people who will only participate in society in a distant future, encourages passivity and a disinterest in civic responsibility later in their lives. Youths disconnecting themselves from the political process in declining percentages such as in elections are signs of the exclusion of young people in political processes. The youth should be considered as people who can participate strongly in society today onwards, than people whose participation is still 'faraway' into the future (Prince, 1997).

Participants of the study gave a couple of specific reasons why citizenship education is important such as ensuring students stay away from drugs and from breaking school rules. However, more specific and current reasons that tie into citizenship education were not done as much as it should probably be. The questionnaire being used in the study, not asking examples, may have contributed. Student teachers, however, should be aware of current issues that impinge on citizenship education for young people such as young people participating less and less in political life or the increasing inter-group conflict in the world. Furthermore, student teachers need to be aware of issues surrounding extremism, uncertainty about youth employment, deforestation and its effect on diversity of life, inequality and poverty, civic responsibility of the mass media. There is also frequent and increasing scale of natural and man made disasters. These and many more issues prevail in society within and outside of their countries that students need to be aware of and possess a sense of responsibility towards. The world is interdependent whether we like or not. Sharing the same world and public life substantiates development of civic character among students. Mathews (1997) thus advises that civic renewal is a major challenge today as we aim to build stronger citizens for a stronger democracy.

Ways to Teach Citizenship Education

In order of strength, student teachers of Teachers College X suggested that citizenship education should be taught by four means, through the formal curriculum (primary, secondary and tertiary); through workshops, seminars and conferences and by taking student and school interests and contexts on board. Fourthly, student teachers indicated integrating citizenship education in all fields and subjects of the school. Many countries incorporate citizenship education through the social studies curriculum (Choi, 2010; Xiao & Tong, 2010), but can also be integrated well with other subjects. It is interesting, nevertheless, that in their mention of the formal curriculum none of the student teachers of Teachers College X mentioned the Early Childhood Education (ECE) setting as a vibrant venue for citizenship education. There were only mentions of the primary, secondary and tertiary levels of education. The omission of early childhood education

may also be a reflection of the general neglect of early childhood education in the Pacific Islands. In Fiji, for example, a national ECE framework for resourcing and financing it does not exist (Camaitoga, Raiula & Afeaki, 2010). Thus, Kumar (2010) stresses that the Fiji and Pacific Island governments need to direct substantial finances into ECE. There is a clear underestimation of the importance of ECE. ECE teachers are the most lowly paid of teachers in Fiji earning usually \$3,500 FJD per year, which is well below the poverty line, and this must change. Such a change has to start with the governments' change of attitude towards ECE. As Sims (2010), emphasises to a Fiji audience, that it pays dividends to invest in ECE. Governments all over the world are spending unnecessarily on many areas, that could have been spent on children's education or on hungry and disadvantaged children. ECE is imperative because it establishes the foundation for all future learning, including citizenship education and as Korhonen and Graeffe (2007) state, the ECE setting is an important place for citizenship education, requiring teacher education institutions to prepare ECE teachers for better active citizenship results.

Most of the suggestions by student teachers of Teachers College X are within the formal learning structures. It is important to note, though, that the way citizenship education is implemented is crucial. As King (1997) explains, citizenship education and character development can be communicated within the formal curriculum, but the way it is delivered also matters. Karsten, Coga, Grossman, Liu and Ptiyanuwat (2002) stress that in citizenship education it should not be about memorisation, passively reading texts, listening, completing worksheets and examinations, but about programs and activities that enhance cooperation, critical thinking and tolerance. However good the quality of learning materials, there may be little effect if citizenship education and civic learning occurs only in a closed classroom. Off-campus learning experiences help develop moral reasoning of students (Pascarella, 1997). Students need to put the right principles into practice, as being a good person is more than simply knowing what is morally right. No matter how much knowledge one has gained about being a good citizen and no matter how one is impressed and touched by certain moral values, it becomes useless when it is not practiced in everyday life. The ultimate goal in citizenship education is acting than merely knowing (Lee, 2001).

The three key elements of a democratic learning process, according to Ehrlich (1997, p. 59) are that the 'process should engage students in reaching out the walls of the classroom and into the surrounding community' and focused on problems to be solved. It should also be collaborative between students and students, and students and staff. In addition, Ehrlich purports that pedagogically, these three elements of the democratic learning process would translate into community-service learning than closed classroom learning, problem-based learning as opposed to discipline-based learning, and collaborative learning as opposed to individual learning. Community-service learning, as a promising pedagogy for citizenship education, can appear in various forms: direct aid or token to an identified need area, education and outreach activities or simply doing policy analysis and research into how a community works and ways to help make an impact. It should involve active, hands-on preparation of students (Ehrlich, 1997).

Problem-based learning, as potential pedagogy for citizenship education and civic learning begins to design its course starting with a problem (s). Depending on student levels, they are capable of tackling increasingly difficult problems using more sophisticated techniques with increasingly complex knowledge bases. A problem-based approach is an important means to prepare students for active participation in the ongoing renewal of democracy. Democracy, in fact, calls for citizens to identify community problems and work communally to solve them (Ehrlich, 1997; Mathews, 1997). The third pedagogical tool is collaborative learning, important in preparing students to collaborate as members of a team. For many students work at school is done alone, therefore, incorporating collaborative learning aims to directly enhance students' abilities to be a productive member of a team (Ehrlich, 1997). Higher education should increasingly incorporate such pedagogical strategies as community-service learning, problem-based learning and collaborative learning into their courses. It is vital that these activities are supported and coordinated within the academic curricula than disjointed volunteering and community activities. This requires colleges and universities to expand, adopt or revise their curriculum offerings. In addition, such curriculum innovations in civic education should still be aligned with other traditions on campus (Liss & Liazoz, 2010).

Having advocated pedagogical styles that engage students outside of the classroom, when a component of instruction occurs within the classroom itself, it should have positive influences on political attitudes and behaviour. These can occur when students perceive their classes to have 'open climates' where students are encouraged to explore and express differing views on controversial issues. The class can be ran as a moral and democratic system resulting in a moral community (Karsten et al., 2002). Teacher educators need to be open to the exploration of ideas, tolerate conflict of ideas and ideals and value student opinion. Universities and colleges have an obligation to help students lead ethical, reflective and fulfilling lives, but it needs to also be realised that students enter higher education with a lifetime of experiences and moral lessons (King, 1997). Students possess a lot of knowledge, skills and attitudes prior to entering our classrooms that instructors need to build from. These can be developed through appropriate pedagogy as well as colleges and universities themselves to be models of how a more inclusive, democratic civic society can operate (Guadiani, 1997). As stated earlier, student teachers of the sampled teachers' college only suggested implementation of citizenship education through the formal education system. However, it must not be forgotten that citizenship education can be extended through cooperation with the home and society. This is important realisation because the child is obviously influenced by life at home, life at school and life in the community. When there is alignment between values taught at school, the home and the child's host community, there is more likely to be long-term behaviour and consciousness being internalised (Lee, 2001; Levine, 2010). In addition, helping implement citizenship and civic education can also be non-governmental organisations, not just the sole province of the formal curriculum (Farouk & Husin, 2011).

Content Area of Citizenship Education

There are four content areas that Student teachers of Teachers College X frequently raise, religious education and Catholicism, moral and values, culture and beliefs and leadership. It is imperative that teacher education and higher education in general have a clear vision of the knowledge, skills and attitudes they hope their graduates would have developed in citizenship education (King, 1997). Colleges and universities are involved in an exchange relationship with the wider society by providing research and service in return for grants, contracts and donations. However, public returns are increasingly being questioned and pose pressures for higher education institutions to show their broader usefulness. Colleges and universities often legitimise their existence as instruments of progress in a democratic society. They also legitimise their existence by providing access to a cross-section of their population. Moreover, there is the issues of quality and purpose of higher education. We can then ask, are we preparing our youths to be leaders and citizens? Are we fostering collaborative, community-based research and developing programs that involves students in civic and service-related education? These may work to help renew public confidence in higher education. Outreach must be a central obligation of the university, not in rhetoric but in reality (Hearn & Holdsworth, 2002).

Colleges and universities can nurture growth in principled moral reasoning. Pascarella (1997) after compiling more than 50 cross-sectional and longitudinal studies concluded that properly structured higher education positively associates with principled moral reasoning among students. Principled moral reasoning then helps to predict students' involvement in community and civic responsibility. Thus, higher education has significant potential to influence its citizens. Students of Teachers' College X saw moral and values as critical contents of citizenship education. King (1997) stresses that there is moral component to citizenship and the development of morality is a complex process. King explains further that there are four major kinds of psychological processes that are necessary for moral behaviour to occur. Moral sensitivity basically says that some people fail to act morally because they simply are unaware of how their actions affect other people, or probably do not even recognise the moral dimensions of the situation at hand. Moral judgement, on the other hand, involves determining the most morally justifiable course of action. Often college and university students interpret fairness of possible negative impact on themselves, than empathy towards others. Moral motivation, as a moral process, entails weighing moral values against other competing values. Moral character affects moral behaviour by influencing one's ability to implement a moral plan of action. It involves working around impediment and resisting distraction to achieve moral goals.

The most suggested content of citizenship education given by first year students of Teachers' College X, however, is religious education and Catholicism. Being a Catholic teacher education institution, Catholicism is particularly emphasised despite mentioning religious education in general. Dalton (1997) agrees that religious and spiritual belief is a pertinent approach to promoting character development and civic responsibility. Personal faith and commitment helps to build core values and virtues, and often provide the conviction to act on them. Student teachers of Teachers' College X also perceive culture

and beliefs as salient content areas of any citizenship education program. This point of view deserves consideration because local cultural values and their relationship to political values and structures are vital. Civic capacity cannot be built on virtues that are either alien or built around personal and political gain. A globalised world demands global values but also needs people to retain distinct values that drive culture and development in their region. These values, to be noted, cannot be regarded as static requiring citizens to evaluate change constantly. When citizens hold onto these values fervently, they will do what they can to protect them when they are under threat (Kennedy, 2000; Xiao & Tong, 2010). Today, very few countries, if at all, can claim to be homogenous in race and ethnicity. Most countries are multicultural with varying backgrounds of race, ethnicity, cultures and creed. Mature citizens are those that are aware and respectful of the existence of these differences. Respecting differences entails pursuing cultural pluralism, that is, equality of different cultures, a democratic value in itself. Multicultural countries would need to continually balance the promotion of national identity, diversity, and global perspectives through education. The curriculum should inculcate national pride and identity, as well as placing emphasis on the idea of an interdependent global community (Choi, 2010; Ho, 2009).

Helping students develop the integrity and strength of character that prepare them for leadership may be one of the goals of higher education (King, 1997). Students of Teachers College X also recognise that leadership should be a key content area. Faculty and staff can develop student leadership by collaborating in a setting that expresses moral consensus and social coherence. Students can be members of university and college boards and committees. Students leaders can contribute to respecting campus traditions, use its resources to the benefit of the student body, and also being able to engage imaginatively with the external environment (Gaudiani, 1997). It is positive to note students of the University of the South Pacific in Fiji, for example, organising a fundraising night, in which cultural groups contributed entertainment items for a gate fee. Funds raised would go towards students who need help in Christchurch, New Zealand; Queensland, Australia; and Japan, who were affected by natural disasters. It is important for students to be involved in practical volunteer and service learning opportunities. Furthermore, there are other ways colleges and universities can develop leadership ability in the area of civic responsibility such as the faculty selecting an annual theme that reflects shared values, providing volunteering opportunities for students in communities, and encourage activities that promote inter-cultural understanding. Or simply being willing to give time to revise a student's paper (Gaudiani, 1997).

Conclusion

Higher education institutions would need to continually rethink what their ultimate purposes are. If it is simply skill acquisition and knowledge mastery, as it has always dominated higher education, colleges and universities may eventually become obsolete. Citizenship values, character and civic life should more commonly be part of conversations in higher education. The dimensions of citizenship and character education may be intangible but are important to building and forging students for the larger societal social good. Higher education institutions have the challenge of helping to shape

graduates to be moral citizens. Teacher education is a venue where citizenship education can positively be channeled through, as classroom teachers are probably the single most important element in school reform and improvement. First year students of a Teachers' College X, have a relatively good understanding on what they think should be in the content of citizenship education, how it should be taught, and the importance of doing so. This had been crucial because initiatives such as citizenship education will not bear lasting results unless teachers are prepared accordingly. Teachers are usually expected to respond to new change initiatives. More than often, teachers are unprepared, unwilling or unskilled for their new roles. Thus, it is important that issues about citizenship education are strongly advocated through teacher education institutions. The fact is that civic capacity can be deliberately developed in citizens through education, either the formal system or through the home, society and other organisations. Thus, educational policies would need to strongly accommodate citizenship education, as often policies are more interested in students achieving in high stakes exams and less of students' self-realisation and character development.

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