Educating for a plural democracy and citizenship – a report on practice

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This paper presents an argument for the relevance of education for critical global citizenship, with reference to a graphic design module at the University of Stellenbosch in South Africa as a case study. The first part of the paper argues that tolerance, cultural diversity, democratic participation and social cohesion are prerequisites for plural democracies. The second part argues that educational institutions, as prominent organisational structures, have an obligation to address these social issues. It is argued that addressing social inequality and developing conditions for democratic flourishing is particularly important in the newly democratised South Africa. Consequently, particular attention is paid to the South African higher education context. The paper then gives an account of an attempt at practically engaging university students in these issues through the university curricula, describing, in terms of its form and content, the above-mentioned graphic design module on critical global citizenship. Finally, it considers to what extent the module has been successful in promoting attitudes of tolerance and social cohesion in a racially and culturally mixed educational environment, using qualitative data collected from participants in the module, and reflects on the ethical and practical challenges that critical citizenship education might face.

Keywords: Critical citizenship, pluralism, social inequality, cultural diversity, social cohesion, tolerance.

Conceptions of citizenship – what kind of citizenship is important and why?

The notion that education plays an integral part in the moral and political development of individuals and their societies has resurfaced in recent educational and political theory (Nussbaum, 2002; Osler & Starkey, 2003; Schuitema, Ten Dam & Veugelers, 2008). Various arguments have been presented in favour of a renewed emphasis on teaching for civic engagement and social change in higher education (Furco, 2010; Hartley, Saltmarsh & Clayton, 2010). These arguments frequently call upon the notion of citizenship to capture values of social responsiveness and political engagement. But what kinds of social responsiveness and political engagement are valuable and desirable? Osler and Starkey (2003) point out that citizenship, since its conception, has been a contested term and, depending on the context, could implicitly support conflicting values and ideals. There can be no neutral conception of citizenship. Indeed, critical theory has encouraged suspicion of any claims of neutrality in social and political realms. Consequently, calls for civic education need to articulate clearly the assumptions, norms and values that support the particular conception upon which they rely. Within the literature on citizenship education it is evident that different understandings of democratic citizenship (Nussbaum, 2002; Waghid, 2002), global citizenship (McDougall, 2005; Weinstein, 2004) and cosmopolitan citizenship (Osler & Starkey, 2003) have been advocated. However, despite the articulation of the different conceptions, the conflict between them is often overlooked.

Osler and Starkey (2003:244) argue that, while contemporary notions of democratic citizenship allow equal participation in theory, "in practice, this formal equality is undermined by discriminatory practices and public discourses that exclude minorities or which marginalise them within the imagined

community of the nation". This suggests that, although liberal democracies are committed to the principles of freedom and equality and, as such, should accommodate multiple cultural identities, in reality, the norms and values of a particular group are naturalised and become dominant. The notion of pluralism seeks to amend this tendency. Weinstein (2004:236) defines pluralism as "the political situation in which people of different fundamental beliefs and histories share equally within a common governance and live within common borders". This conception requires the separation of public and private spheres, and assumes that the public sphere is a neutral one. Thinkers opposed to the notion of a 'neutral' political and social space are critical of the idea of pluralism and suggest an alternative in the form of multi-culturalism. Weinstein (2004:237) refers to a counterclaim made by Feinberg that multiculturalists "suspect that this idealised common identity is just a disguise for the dominance of one cultural group over others". Instead, multiculturalists propose a less compartmentalised understanding of public and private space and advocate the expression and promotion of different cultures within the public sphere. Weinstein (2004:237) responds that pluralism, and indeed liberalism, has no right to make such a claim to neutrality in the public sphere but, instead, has to substantiate the values it promotes as an equal participant in a democratic system.

Weinstein (2004:237) points out that the traditional role of politics and philosophy as set out by the Greek thinkers was the defining and promoting of 'the good life' (Aristotle, Nussbaum). The defining aspect of liberalism is that the state is neutral on the question of good life. In liberal thought, this question is an individual prerogative, which is exempt from social judgement unless individual choices infringe on the freedom of others. Weinstein (2004:237) (along with thinkers such as John Rawls and Michael Sandel) argues that liberalism does, in fact, make various non-neutral value claims – the most obvious being freedom itself: "[T]o choose freedom over restraint is a violation of neutrality, yet this non-neutral commitment lies irrevocably at the core of liberal theory". The implication is that issues of common governance are never self-evident, and that values such as pluralism, freedom, open market and equality need to be justified and defended over others, and not assumed as given social or human conditions. Furthermore, these values always have cultural attachments and should be acknowledged as such.

Martha Nussbaum argues that values such as tolerance, equality and non-discrimination should not be seen as positive values in themselves only, but as guards against destructive human tendencies. She asks what it is about human life "that makes it so hard to sustain democratic institutions based on equal respect and the equal protection of the laws, and so easy to lapse into hierarchies of various types – or, even worse, projects of violent group animosity" (Nussbaum, 2010:28). She suggests various conditions which are conducive to the flourishing of discriminatory social behaviour, and argues that the cultivation of principles of accountability, tolerance and equality work to resist these tendencies. As societies become increasingly plural, the cultivation of these values becomes increasingly urgent. If pluralism and mutual respect across national and cultural boundaries are values that we want to promote, it is not clear that traditional national citizenship, which prioritises national unity and singular loyalty over difference and dissonance, facilitates this. Sung (2010:77) refers to Stuart Hall who argues that "market liberalism has deeply engaged in efforts to decouple the link between citizenship and a caring society"; rather "they have tried to link the liberty of citizens with property rights". Critical global citizenship takes into account the socially constituted nature of identity, which requires a conception of citizenship that extends beyond an individual collection of rights.

Theorists considering what notions of citizenship are conducive to the development of peaceful and tolerant societies in a globalised world, have begun to advocate a more symbolic and inclusive notion of citizenship. Nussbaum (2002, 2010) has come to understand citizenship in terms of individual and group attitudes and identities as well as a collection of legal rights and responsibilities. This conception affords individual autonomy and responsibility to members of diverse groups who are (in theory) held accountable for their own behaviour as members of a larger 'global' group. McDougall (2005:25) describes global citizenship as "a moral disposition which guides individuals' understanding of themselves as members of communities both on global and local levels – and their responsibilities to these communities". Belonging to different communities, which might promote conflicting values, could create some instability in the creation of individual and group identities. To deal with this conflict, theorists advocate a conception

of identity that encompasses multiple loyalties and at the same time emphasises individual action. McDougall (2005:10) uses the idea of "concentric patterns of community" and "homes of identity" to understand complex group identity. This understanding is supported by Osler and Starkey (2003: 244) who postulate the individual as having "shifting and multiple cultural identities". Instead of denying these sometimes opposing forces, Weinstein (2004) advocates a process of "cognitive conflict", particularly in young people grappling with questions of identity and authority, which encourages critical engagement with difference. This conception of democratic citizenship is not reliant on social conditions of unity and cultural homogeneity and is thus particularly useful in the South African context.

Critical citizenship and the university

The second part of this paper aims to explore the role of the university (particularly South African universities) in addressing social and democratic development through critical citizenship education. Osler and Starkey (2003:245) highlight the connections between particular political developments and a renewed interest in citizenship education. They argue that educational institutions in recently democratised countries (such as South Africa) need to educate a new generation of citizens about principles of democracy and human rights. In this instance, a re-education from an exclusive and racially unequal to an inclusive, egalitarian understanding of citizenship, which could translate into social practice, is necessary for all involved in educational institutions. In addition, emphasising civic duties and the capabilities held by individuals could restore confidence in democratic processes in the face of an apparent crisis in formal politics (Osler & Starkey, 2003:245) and thus foster a generation of informed and politically engaged citizens. This correlates with the emphasis laid on individual responsibility and agency in recent conceptions of citizenship, which aim to challenge global trends of political apathy. Finally, as discussed above, global shifts have resulted in demographic changes all over the world, which present an increasing need to educate young people to be able to understand and tolerate difference and cultural diversity (Osler & Starkey, 2003:245). This new cosmopolitanism has two distinct aspects: first, that people far away from one another are more exposed to one another's cultures and lives, and, second, that communities in themselves have an increasingly more historically, culturally and racially diverse composition. In all three aspects, institutions of higher education play a crucial role. However, particular challenges are encountered in focussing on critical citizenship in South African higher education institutions (HEIs).

The imperatives of the global market present a challenge to the cultivation of values that support pluralism and diversity within South African HEIs. Reddy argues that, in one instance, universities are called upon to "perform as viable 'corporate enterprises' producing graduates to help steer South Africa into a competitive global economy. In the second, universities are expected to serve the public good and produce critical citizens for a vibrant democratic society" (Reddy, 2007:5). He suggests that, although "these two tendencies need not be inherently contradictory, they do contain in a country with deep class, race and gender divisions the possibility of pulling in opposite directions". The implication of Reddy's argument is that pressure to produce skilled workers often overrides the need to produce a tolerant and critical citizenry. Although social and economic reconstruction should develop co-operatively, the national economy, instead of levels of social cohesion and stability, is taken as the primary signifier of development. South African universities tend to privilege what Nussbaum (2010:10) calls "education for economic growth" over education for social cohesion and understanding. Nussbaum (2010:10) argues for the priority of educating for "the stability of democratic institutions, since a strong economy is a means to human ends, not an end in itself".

The South African context presents another urgent call for a focus on citizenship education which relates to its apartheid and colonial past. As education played a defining role in the maintenance of a segregated social order, through both its structure and content, there has been an expectation within the democratic social order that educational institutions might be redefined in a post-apartheid era "to serve more emancipatory purposes" (Vale & Jacklin, 2009:21). However, recent research suggests that many HEIs have failed to live up to this expectation and, while there have been significant demographic changes in the institutions, in some instances, reproduce rather than challenge social inequality. The Report of the

Ministerial Committee on Transformation and Social Cohesion and the Elimination of Discrimination in Public Higher Education Institutions (2008) makes it clear that, although institutionalised practices of racial exclusion which characterised the apartheid era have been discontinued, there are still considerable cultural, social and racial divisions in the institutional culture in most universities. Michael Apple's analysis of educational institutions is helpful in this regard. He argues that, because they are "'naturally' generated out of many of educators' commonsense assumptions and practices about teaching and learning, normal and abnormal behaviour, important and unimportant knowledge", educational institutions can create "conditions and forms of interaction [that reproduce structures of inequality]" (Apple, 1979:63). As a result, we cannot assume that education functions as one of "the great engines of democracy" (although it *can*), but rather that educational institutions "are not necessarily or always progressive forces (Apple, 1979:63). In the context of the democratisation of South Africa, this perspective suggests that we cannot assume the democratic transformation of all social institutions. Rather, transforming social values and unequal forms of interaction should be a conscious and continual process that works against the 'natural' modus operandi of social and educational institutions. Fourie (1999:277) argues that transformation of HEIs in South Africa requires a deep and integrated response which demands the "development and acceptance of new, shared values [which] can only be achieved through fundamental changes in the mindset ('cognitive transcendence') of all stakeholders and role-players". The imperative to shift mindsets and cultivate tolerant attitudes instead of enact superficial commitments to democratic transformation ties in with the aims of critical citizenship education.

Conditions at the Visual Arts Department at the University of Stellenbosch indicated a need for globally oriented critical citizenship education. The mission statements of both the Stellenbosch University and the Visual Arts Department (see References) emphasise the importance of respect for diversity and difference and knowledge applied for the benefit of the community. It is clear, however, that both the University and the Visual Arts Department are struggling with the implementation of policies and initiatives to integrate racially and culturally diverse groups on campus. This relates partly to language issues but, more important perhaps, also to perceptions and attitudes formed in colonial and apartheid years, which have become features of particular group identities. The fact that the institution (in both student and staff composition) remains, to a large extent, racially and culturally homogenous means that there is a distinct lack of interaction between young people from different socioeconomic and racial groups within the Visual Arts Department. This could contribute to a lack of experiential knowledge of the complex social and political problems facing South Africa, many of which can be avoided or overlooked through the comfort of privilege. The educational structure – in both form and content – suggested a need to grapple more directly with issues relating to social inequality and cultural tolerance and understanding. A module which sought to address these issues was built into the core curriculum and drew strongly from Nussbaum's criteria for education for critical democratic citizenship – in both the structure of the module and the content it covered.

Nussbaum's (2002) criteria are to develop a critical consciousness, which allows students to question their own traditions while practising a mutual respect for reason; to think as citizens of the world; and to develop a 'narrative imagination', which fosters a deeper understanding of difference and diversity. Nussbaum (2002:301) advocates an educational approach that could "cultivate [students'] ability to see complex humanity in places where they are most accustomed to deny it". This kind of skill requires theoretical and experiential knowledge as well as the use of the imagination. Consequently, the citizenship module was composed of three main components: theoretical learning, social and experiential learning and creative or imaginative learning. The theoretical learning component took the form of readings and seminar sessions covering a range of topics, including blackness/whiteness, stereotyping, power relations, discrimination, helping behaviour, risk, family and social memory. The themes were placed in the South African context of post-colonial and post-apartheid history. The social or experiential learning component centred on a partnership between the Visual Arts Department and a local youth development NGO called Vision K, which works with high school students from Kayamandi (a township in Stellenbosch). The equally numbered groups of design students and high school students for the most part differed with

regard to race, class and culture. The interaction and co-operation between the groups was to form the basis of the multi-cultural teaching and learning process and thus facilitate critical citizenship education. The students were paired and embarked on discussions of topical issues and relevant social problems, which would often be raised or chosen by the students themselves and related back to the theoretical research component. Together, partners had to find a solution to a design brief which either would be a visual exploration of, or a response to, a social issue. Interactive sessions, which would take place over an afternoon, were conducted at the high school in Kayamandi. The groups would often move out of the classrooms into the streets and homes around the school as students conducted visual and field research.

The information resulting from the conversations was then used in a typographical layout. The medium of art and design is particularly conducive to the exercises in 'narrative imagination' required to foster mutual respect and tolerance and to investigate rarely articulated and sensitive human issues. Nussbaum (2002:299) describes narrative imagination as "the ability to think what it might be like in the shoes of a person different from oneself". The development of this capacity for a 'moral imagination' has traditionally been the prerogative of the arts, which provides a space for 'non-instrumental' knowledge production and the possibility of reflection and introspection. In order to assess the effectiveness and value of critical citizenship education with regard to the attitude and perception changes which it enabled, we have tried to identify the most significant ethical and practical challenges that arose through the implementation of the module. Students would write reflections before, during and after the process. These became our principle source of data through which to evaluate the module, along with interviews and our own reflections as facilitators.

Teaching and learning in multi-cultural contexts: Problems and assumptions

Research revealed that mandatory Community Interaction projects implemented into a curriculum without a 'knowledge producing' or learning component easily dissipate into a thinly substantiated exercise in charity. The high school students had initially participated in weekly workshops and classes in the department which were facilitated or taught by the design students. The idea was that high school students would benefit from the extra-mural art classes, as art as a subject was not provided by any of their schools, and that design students would benefit from both the teaching experience and the social interaction. After one year, the arrangement was reviewed through a series of interviews with and reflections from all students. During the interviews, 67% of the design students said that they participated in the interactions because it counted toward their final mark, while 9% remarked that they had not learnt anything from these interactions and 5% felt that it was their Christian duty to participate. Reactions from the students who were uncritically assimilated into 'community projects' recalled Steve Biko's insights into the psychological dimension of racialised power hierarchies. Biko (2004:23) said that forced integration can be an illusion and often provides a "vague satisfaction for the guilt-stricken whites". Research showed that all that was achieved was that the concept of "white as knowledgeable and black as needy" (Biko, 2004:23) was perpetuated. The restructuring of the module in order to facilitate meaningful transformation of attitudes for both Stellenbosch University and Kayamandi students was based on the principles of reciprocity and exchange rather than service and help. However, although the revised structure served to challenge perceptions of what kinds of knowledge and education are valid and why, the 'charity' problem remained salient. A high school student remarked, "I have learned that I can help someone even if I'm not educated". For the high school students then, the project did serve to challenge the social hierarchies that they had come to expect. In this way they were able to think beyond the confines of a paradigm of 'charity' and 'outreach' in a way that many university students felt unable to do. This emerged as another barrier to equal interaction. A design student pointed out that it was difficult "to guard against not viewing the white person as the 'saviour' figure and the black students as those in need of saving".

Students' reflections after the first few weeks revealed that the groups held deep prejudices about one another, which presented a barrier to equal interaction. Some of the design students' reflections revealed deeply ingrained attitudes and perceptions that they held about people who lived in townships. Fanon (1967) writes about the notion of the white people's gaze and the fascination with the poor or exotic as a

strategy of 'othering'. A student remarked, "[i]t felt as if we were tourists exploring a foreign country … it was as if we were looking in from the outside, observing and judging their lifestyle, without the adequate knowledge to do so". Although the township of Kayamandi geographically is part of the university town of Stellenbosch, most university students had never been there and experienced the first visit as alien. This was recognised as problematic, because actual reflective learning could be hampered if the interaction remained on a level of fascination. The tendency of the university students to unconsciously enlist this strategy of 'othering' highlights the extent to which their own culture has been established as the norm. Seekings (2008: 6) argues that "white South Africans – like white people in many other contexts – take their culture for granted"; consequently, "[c]ulturally, whiteness is invisible to most white people". The naturalisation of white culture disguises its dominance over other cultures. As long as whiteness is not critically analysed as a constructed (rather than naturally given) identity by white people, its invisible dominance will not be challenged (Snyman, 2008). Britzman (in Kumashiro, 2000:36-37) argues that "[d]eveloping a critical consciousness" to address this problem "involves not only learning about the processes of privileging/normalizing and marginalizing/Othering, but also unlearning what one had previously learned is 'normal' and normative".

Some student reflections indicated that the interactions with the Kayamandi students gave them a new sense of self-awareness and an awareness of their backgrounds and cultures. A student remarked: "[i]t is now that I understand the profundity in the simple research conducted at Kayamandi; it allows for an internal inspection of your own situation through others, the people you thought were so different from you". The Kayamandi students also indicated that the opportunity for self-reflection was a valuable outcome of the project. One student said that "[t]he project was very interesting in a way that other people around us really want to know about how we as people in Kayamandi live our lives. It was good because I got a chance to talk about my life without being discriminated against". Another thought that "this was a great opportunity to talk about blacks openly". The project appeared to offer the high school students an opportunity not only to talk about, but also to critically examine their culture and traditions. Nussbaum (2002) argues that the ability to criticise one's own traditions is a crucial step in the promotion of cultural tolerance and social cohesion.

Students expressed a fear of being blamed for apartheid and of being white. A student remarked, "I experienced a lot of guilt throughout the programme … I felt guilty being more privileged" and another student said, "[i]t made me want to be a better person, like herself [her high school partner], because she didn't see me as a bad person for being white". Evident here is the assumption that the response to difference would manifest in prejudice or intolerance. Paolo Freire (in Palmer, 2001:131) talks about the "irresistible tendency of opposing the differences". Resisting this tendency is often an unsettling process, as it represents a deeply ingrained cognitive and physical attitude towards the world. Moacir Gadotti (1996:xvi) explains that "[e]ducation presupposes a transformation, and there is no peaceful kind of transformation. There is always conflict and rupture with something, with, for instance, prejudices, habits, types of behaviours and the like". Face-to-face interactions between the students, who were unlikely to meet through the course of their ordinary lives, presented a powerful challenge to deeply set personal and cultural frameworks. However, while the project sought to highlight cultural and racial difference as a topic of engagement, instead of pretending that it was irrelevant, it was sometimes unclear whether emphasis on difference, in fact, deepened rather than provided insight into processes of racial stereotyping and discrimination. The ambiguity of the findings pointed to McLellan and Pillay's (2010:21) argument that "universities should acknowledge and embrace ambivalence as it is often such contradictions that can open up spaces for conversation and interaction among a university's stakeholders and that might yield additional avenues of development for the university". In light of this, the outcomes of the citizenship module, though still fraught with problems, might be an affirmative response to McLellan and Pillay's (2010:22) question of whether "the acknowledgement and embracing of ambivalence toward diversity and difference ... can present valuable opportunities for transformation".

Conclusion

This paper has argued in favour of an understanding of democracy as a form of social organisation which accommodates difference and manages conflict rather than one which requires conditions of social homogeneity. The role that education might play in the strengthening of this kind of social organisation is in "establishing a social morality 'that enables shared practices and mutual intelligible interactions while communicating divergent opinions, beliefs and values'" (Jansen *et al.*, 2006 in Oloyede, 2009:433). Since accepting difference and developing shared practices might be processes which produce both social conflict and harmony, critical citizenship education must remain open to the possibility of dissonance and ambiguity when engaging students with difference and diversity. Despite (or perhaps because of) the module's emphasis on exploring cultural difference, the predominant (though not unanimous) response from both groups of students was surprise at the feeling of commonality instead of 'otherness' that arose between learning partners. This outcome suggests both the existence of deeply entrenched cultural prejudices as well as the possibility of educating for tolerance and social cohesion.

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