

'Active learning for active citizenship'

Democratic citizenship and lifelong learning

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ABSTRACT

This article explores to what extent citizenship education for lifelong learning should be based on a more 'political' or civic republican conception of citizenship as compared to a liberal individualist conception, which emphasizes individual rights, or a communitarian conception, which emphasizes moral and social responsibilities. It also considers how people are finding new ways to engage in civic participation which can provide the basis for certificated or accredited lifelong learning for democratic citizenship. It examines, in particular, the 'Active Learning for Active Citizenship' programme, which was funded by what was previously the Civic Renewal Unit of the Home Office and the possibility of a learning democratic citizenship based on the theory and practice of deliberative democratic engagement.

KEYWORDS *civic republicanism, communitarianism, education for democratic citizenship, lifelong learning*

citizenship education and the concept of citizenship, everyday politics and civic engagement

It could be argued that the conception of citizenship underlying UK lifelong learning for citizenship should be a civic republican one which emphasizes democratic political participation. This reflects the influence of Bernard Crick and the ex-Minister David Blunkett. One of the key challenges facing the introduction of citizenship education in the UK is the question about whether and in what respects citizenship is 'British'. Elizabeth Frazer (1999a) has written

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about the 'British exceptionalism' towards discussing citizenship and David Miller (2000: 26) has written that 'citizenship – except in the formal passport-holding sense – is not a widely understood idea in Britain. People do not have a clear idea of what it means to be a citizen Citizenship is not a concept that has played a central role in our political tradition.' The question concerning to what extent British people are familiar or comfortable with the concept of citizenship raises questions about the extent to which the political language of citizenship and civic republicanism can increasingly be seen as a tradition of 'British' political thought which can provide the basis for a transformation of the more dominant liberal individualist political traditions.

In the UK the current 'New Labour' government has espoused a programme of civil renewal that links the public, private and voluntary and community sectors to work for the common good. This is informed by a set of beliefs and values involving faith traditions, ethical socialism, communitarianism and more recently civic republicanism. According to David Blunkett (2003: 19), when he was the Home Secretary:

The 'civic republican' tradition of democratic thought has always been an important influence for me ... This tradition offers us a substantive account of the importance of community, in which duty and civic virtues play a strong and formative role. As such, it is a tradition of thinking which rejects unfettered individualism and criticizes the elevation of individual entitlements above the common values needed to sustain worthwhile and purposeful lives. We do not enter life unencumbered by any community commitments, and we cannot live in isolation from others.

It is this civic republican conception of politics which I would argue animates key aspects of New Labour's policies from citizenship education to its strategy towards revitalizing local communities.

Richard Dagger (1997) in his influential study of civic education argues that a civic republican conception of citizenship can reconcile both liberal individuality and the cultivation of civic virtue and responsibility. He (1997: 58) writes that, 'There is too much of value in the idea of rights – an idea rooted in firm and widespread convictions about human dignity and equality – to forsake it. The task, instead, is to find a way of strengthening the appeal of duty, community and related concepts while preserving the appeal of rights' (cf. Maynor, 2003).

The creation of a shared political identity underlying citizenship should also allow for multiple political identities based on gender, race, ethnicity, social exclusion, etc. It may be that the civic republican politics of contestability, as recently argued for by Philip Pettit (1997), may provide a more pluralist basis for citizenship in contemporary Britain than traditional republican politics. Equally, recent theorists of liberal democracy like Eamonn Callan (1997) also argue that an education for citizenship must hold fast to a constitutive ideal of liberal democracy while allowing for religious and cultural pluralism. A more

differentiated but universal concept of citizenship. (Lister, 1997, 1998), which encourages civic virtue and participation while maintaining individual liberty and allows for cultural difference, will create a way of understanding citizenship that is appropriate for an education for citizenship and democracy.

It could be argued that the recent establishment of an education for citizenship in England may be based more on a communitarian concern for moral and political socialization than promoting civic engagement. Following Elizabeth Frazer's distinction between a 'philosophical communitarianism' and a 'political communitarianism' (Frazer, 1999b; cf. Tam, 1998, 2001), Adrian Little (2002) raises some important questions about the apolitical conception of community in communitarianism. He (2002: 154) writes that, 'As such, the sphere of community is one of contestation and conflict as much as it is one of agreement. Thus, essentially, it is deeply political. Where orthodox communitarians see politics as something to be overcome to the greatest possible extent, radicals argue that the downward devolution of power will entail more politics rather than less.' Both Little and Frazer in their studies of the political communitarianism consider the revival of civic republicanism as emerging from the debate between liberal and communitarian conceptions of the politics of community. In civic republicanism (Oldfield, 1990, Petit, 1997; Maynor, 2003) freedom consists of active self-government and liberty rests not simply in negative liberty but in active participation in a political community.

In the USA this debate is also reflected in the writings of Benjamin Barber (1984), Michael Sandel (1996) and William Galston (2001), which have been promoting a civic republican conception of citizenship. According to Barber (1992), the fundamental problem facing civil society is the challenge of providing citizens with 'the literacy required to live in a civil society, the competence to participate in democratic communities, the ability to think critically and act deliberately in a pluralist world, the empathy that permits us to hear and thus accommodate others, all involve skills that must be acquired'. Joseph Kahne and Joel Westheimer (2003) recommend a model of citizenship education based on the principles of social justice and Harry Boyte (2004) a model based on the concept of 'public work'. This debate about what is an appropriate model of citizenship for citizenship education raises questions about the need for students to move beyond an individualistic and also consumer conceptions of citizenship and develop a model of 'civic republican' and democratic citizenship education.

This reconsideration of the concept of citizenship and citizenship education should also be informed by the recent work on the 'politics of everyday life' which can broaden our understanding what 'the political' could mean in the lives of all citizens (Boyte, 2004; Bentley, 2005; Crick, 2005; Ginsbourg, 2005; Stoker, 2006). We need to have more research into how do people understand the 'political' as it relates to their everyday concerns in their communities as compared to the more formal political sphere of voting, political parties

and holding public office. This broader conception of the political reflects the decline of formal political participation and lack of trust in formal politics at a time when there is evidence of continuing forms of civic engagement which may escape the radar of Robert Putnam's (2000) research into social capital (see also Sirianni and Friedland, 2004, 2005; Power Inquiry, 2006). This also reflects the important distinction that should be made between volunteering which lead to active citizenship and a more political form of civic engagement in community which can lead to democratic citizenship.

In the USA, and now beginning in the UK, academics are viewing service learning or community based learning as an important part of an education for active citizenship, which I would argue can be based either on a more communitarian conception of citizenship (volunteering or community service) or a more 'political or civic republican conception of citizenship (civic engagement and non-formal political participation)'.

'politics' and community involvement

In his short book on democratic theory Bernard Crick (2002: 115) has written, I remain concerned, though, that the interpretation of "community involvement" that underpins the Citizenship curriculum will involve a conception of the community that sees it simply as a place or neighbourhood where students are merely 'active': *doing good* rather than *political good* (ie *informed, effective citizens*. That is, the new curriculum will result in forms of volunteering that will fail to challenge the students to think and act "politically" ...'.

In contemporary political thinking the concept of community has become both philosophically and 'politically' significant. Community has also become increasingly the focus of government policy in the UK and the USA. From the 'Third-Way' communitarianism of New Labour or the New Democrats, to the emergence of communitarian based 'Compassionate Conservatism', the idea of community is now seen as a key to rethinking the relationship between civil society and the state. Government social policy concerning neighbourhood renewal and urban renaissance stresses the role of citizens in inner city areas in designing and rebuilding their communities (Sirianni and Friedland, 2004; Taylor, 2003).

Linked to this challenge is the perceived sense of the loss of community in contemporary British society. This lost sense of community also underlies the idea of social capital, which has recently been popularized by Robert Putnam (2000) in his study of the decline of civic engagement and social capital in the USA. The concept of social capital has provided a theoretical basis for understanding the importance of community, which according to the neo-Tocquevillian analysis of Robert Putnam and his colleagues has important consequences for citizenship and political participation. While Putnam and others have analysed the decline of traditional volunteering in the USA it

is interesting to note that in the UK there has been a much smaller decline (Hall, 2002 and Putnam, 2002).

In contemporary political and sociological theory there has been a renewed interest in the idea of community (Bauman, 2000; Delanty, 2003). The concept of community is an elastic concept which allows for an enormous range of meanings. From virtual communities to imaginary communities there are conceptual understandings of community to be found in a wide range of traditions of thought and academic disciplines. I would argue that there are at least four main ways of conceptualizing community. (There are a number of contemporary writers who offer alternative ways of representing the varying understandings of the meaning of community [Frazer, 1999; Nash, 2002; Delanty, 2003; Taylor, 2003].) The first is to consider community descriptively as a place or neighbourhood. The second is to talk of community as a normative ideal linked to respect, solidarity and inclusion, which can be found in the now well established debate between liberalism and its communitarian critics (Mulhall and Swift, 1996). The third way of understanding community is based on the construction of cultural identities and can be found in communities of 'interest'. This conception is based on a politics of identity and recognition of difference. The fourth way is to consider community as a political ideal which is linked to participation, involvement and citizenship, especially on the level of the community.

It is the case, of course, that these conceptual understandings of community are often elided and combined to produce hybrid conceptualizations of contemporary community. Thus a political understanding of community may be based in a specific neighbourhood where there are 'public places' and may include a variety of communities of identity or interest. It is also the case that political communitarianism can be understood through the analysis of the politics of community in terms of liberalism, communitarianism or civic republicanism. Advocates of both communitarianism and civic republicanism have recently begun to revive the idea of a civic service linked to the ideal of service to the local community. In Britain, a number of authors have argued for a national voluntary Citizen's Service initiative and more recently in the USA there has been a renewed interest in establish a form of national service, which would build on the success of the Americorps programme of the Corporation for National Service (Dionne et al., 2003; Blunkett, 2008). Susan Stroud, based on her previous work for the Ford Foundation, has also been exploring this theme internationally (<http://www.icip.org>).

civil/civic renewal and active citizenship

David Blunkett in his Edithm Kalm Menorial Lecture and various publications and speeches has called for a new *civic renewal*, or *civic engagement* which emphasizes new forms and levels of community involvement in local and

regional governance. This work has been carried on by Hazel Blears as Minister for the Department for Communities and Local Government as part of its community empowerment strategy. This new democratic politics, which would include referendums, consultative activities, and deliberative participation, has found support from organizations as diverse as the Local Government Association and the prominent think tank IPPR (2004). One outcome of this shift in thinking, which might be termed a switch from *government* to *governance*, is the obligation upon local authorities to establish Local Strategic Partnerships, a duty arising from the Local Government Act 2000. These partnerships seek to involve local communities in the development of community strategies. Previously, the Home Office established a Civil Renewal Unit, which has begun piloting an 'Active Learning for Active Citizenship' programme through which it is intended that adult learners will develop the capacity to engage in deliberative democracy at a local level. This unit is now the Community Empowerment Unit in the Department for Communities and Local Government and the 'together We Can' cross-departmental strategy is being supported by the new 'Community Empowerment Strategy' (Brannan et al., 2007).

In the USA, this civic renewal movement has led commentators to challenge the assumption of Robert Putnam and others that there has been a fundamental decline in social capital and civic participation. Carmen Sirianni and Lewis Friedland (2004, 2005) have mapped out the different dimensions of this movement and while recognizing the decline of more traditional forms of civic engagement and political participation, like membership of formal organizations, voting and membership of political parties. They argue that there are new and changing forms of civic renewal and call for greater and more creative forms of civic engagement (see also Skocpol et al., 1999). Internationally, there is evidence of new global networks emerging which promote these new forms of civic engagement and deliberative democracy (Fung and Wright, 2003; Gastil and Levine, 2005).

This recent work on civic renewal also points out the limitations of social capital theory by recognizing the need to go beyond both bridging and bonding social capital and enable political action through linking social capital. Without vertical political networking, for example, poor communities do not necessarily gain access to new forms of political influence (Edwards et al., 2001; Woolcock, 2001; Field, 2003)

'lifelong learning for active citizenship' and community involvement

In the UK there are increasingly capacity building programmes for people in the voluntary and community sectors who participate in partnership working

in Single Regeneration Budget Programmes and New Deal for Communities Programmes. There are also the 'Local Strategic Partnerships' (LSPs) for the development of local authority 'community strategies', which in key areas of deprivation are linked to Neighbourhood Renewal Programme. These LSPs that are funded by the Neighbourhood Renewal Programme now have Community Empowerment Networks and funding for community learning. These capacity building programmes and the experiential learning involved in participating in regeneration activities offer an important opportunity for structuring non-formal lifelong learning for active citizenship (Henderson and Mayo, 1998; Anastascio et al., 2000; Thompson, 2001; Mayo, 2002). The learning theory and practice of service learning, with its emphasis on 'reflective practice' and the development of active citizenship through experiential learning can be adapted to provide a way of learning that best meets the needs of adult learners who are actively involved in their communities. In many of these cases the interest in lifelong learning for active citizenship may be more with building social capital (Putnam, 2000) than with capacity building for democratic political participation (Edwards et al., 2001; Annette, 2003). While recent research by Charles Pattie, Patrick Seyd and Paul Whitely (2004) provide a framework for examining attitudes in the UK towards citizenship and there is growing research on the nature and forms of political participation (Parry et al., 1992; Schlozman et al., 1994; Seyd and Whiteley, 1996), much more research is needed to more fully understand the complex political attitudes of people in order to establish more effective forms of political participation. Research in this area also needs to go beyond the limited conception of politics that can be found in the literature of political socialization.

There is an increasing amount of research into the relationship between volunteering and adult learning. This includes both the formal learning required for the professionalization of volunteer management and the non-formal and informal learning outcomes of the experience of volunteering on adults (Elsey, 1993; Elsdon, 1995, 2000). There is evidence that volunteers are increasingly looking to gain knowledge and skills for employability through volunteering (Elsey, 1993). The types of learning that occur in volunteer settings cross the range of adult learning. At the core of this development is the recognition of reflective learning, which is based on the principles of experiential learning. Elsdon (1995) has found that many volunteer activities produce learning outcomes that involve personal growth, self-confidence and a range of key skills and capabilities. While this research represents an important beginning it does not match the extensive research into the learning outcomes of service learning in the USA (Eyler and Giles, 1999). In particular, it does not address the question of whether volunteer activity promotes not only bonding and bridging social capital but also democratic citizenship (Kahane, 2000 and Annette, 2003).

'active learning for active citizenship'/ALAC

In 2004, the Civil Renewal Unit of the Home Office, which was established under the influence of the then Home Secretary David Blunkett, enabled the development of the 'Active Learning for Active Citizenship' or ALAC programme for adult learning in the community for citizenship. In a scoping report by Val Woodward entitled, 'Active Learning for Active Citizenship' a participatory and community-based pedagogy was proposed (Woodward, 2004). This learning framework is analogous to one which is proposed by Pam Coare and Rennie Johnston (2003), which they argue should be inclusive, pluralistic, reflexive and promotes active citizenship. They emphasize the need to listen to community voices in determining what forms of learning meet the needs of different communities. In their action research-based evaluation by Mayo and Rooke (2006) recognize that the ALAC programme did not result in a formal national curriculum but instead provides a learning framework which is participatory, community based, one which recognizes difference while enabling a shared political identity of citizenship and which enables an understanding of global interdependence.

An important feature of participatory politics which has recently been emphasized is that of the need to enable the capacity to participate in deliberative democratic engagement. From citizens juries to community visioning the deliberative engagement of citizens has become an increasing feature of the new localism and also public service delivery (Lowndes, 1998; Fung and Wright, 2003; Barnes et al., 2007; Brannan et al., 2007) More recently there has been growing international interest in participatory budgeting from the more famous example of Porto Alegre in Brazil to developments in the UK like the experiment in Lewisham in London. The work of the Power Commission and think tanks like the IPPR, the New Economics Foundation, Involve, etc. now promote a more participatory and deliberative form of citizen engagement (IPPR, 2004; Involve, 2005; Power Commission, 2006; Leighninger, 2008; Rosenberg, 2008). What has been lacking has been an analysis of what form of capacity building is necessary for citizens to participate in these activities and in what ways does participation in deliberative democratic engagement provide a form an education for democratic citizenship (Eslin et al., 2001; Gastil and Levine, 2005; Van der Veen et al., 2008). This involves a consideration of how deliberative democratic theory, like the emphasis on inclusion and voice in the work of Iris Marion Young, can influence educational practice. It also means that the analysis of the institutional practice of deliberative democratic engagement must develop an understanding of experiential learning and the means to analyse its learning outcomes. We need to know more about how citizens can develop the civic skills necessary for deliberative democratic engagement (Kirlin, 2003).

A particular civic skills which is necessary is that of 'civic listening' and not just 'civic speaking'. This would include both levels of emotional literacy and intercultural understanding.

In conclusion, I would like to note how the New Labour Government's programme for the modernization of local government and its community empowerment strategies provide the opportunity for local people to get involved in local government and regeneration partnership boards. This is part of a shift from local government to local governance and such activities provide rich opportunities for non-formal lifelong learning for active citizenship (Newman, 2001, 2005). This non-formal experiential learning would benefit from being informed by the theory and practice of community based learning as developed in the USA and now growing internationally (Annette, 2001). Research into the working of the community leadership involved in Single Regeneration Budget partnerships, New Deal for Communities elected boards, 'Local Strategic Partnerships' and now regional empowerment networks in England has highlighted the need for capacity building programmes for active citizenship and community leadership. This research also recognizes the importance of the political context within which these activities take place (Purdue et al., 2002; Annette, 2003; Taylor, 2003; Annette and Mayo, forthcoming). The opportunity for a lifelong learning for active citizenship through participation in local governance and regeneration partnership working provides for the possible development of a civic republican or participatory democratic conception of citizenship. What is needed is the provision of a lifelong learning for active citizenship that involves participatory experiential learning and an innovative form of 'political' learning.

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