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Workshop
"Educating for Compulsory Participation:
The New Qualities of Citizenship"

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The key point in my presentation was a problematisation of some approaches to citizenship education, which undermine the conception of citizenship (treating people as less than rational subjects) and undermine the sphere of education (by politicising the teacher-student relationship). Attempting to use education as a short cut to societal change tends to locate the problems (of a lack of democracy or post-conflict tensions) within the minds or rationalities of those receiving citizenship education. This tends to problematise those who are often the most vulnerable and marginalised and to reduce problems to mindsets rather than considering the importance of historical, economic and social contexts and relations. These types of interventions can be easily understood to be both misplaced and patronising but ironically the undemocratic and often elitist impulses behind these approaches are rarely reflected upon by practitioners and advocates working in this field.

In the discussion there was broad agreement on the potentially patronising nature of mainstream approaches to citizenship education. The audience and some panellists moved towards the clarification of more 'empowering approach', in which citizenship education was less about indoctrination and the formalistic acceptance of international liberal norms and more about the development of capacities and capabilities, following the broad 'agent-centred' understanding articulated by Amartya Sen. Rather than a one-size fits all teaching on liberal values the purpose was then to enable an expanded sphere of choice-making capabilities. This less 'goal-directed' and increasingly content-free approach could easily be seen as merely a reactive response to the problems of elitism implicit especially in attempts to export citizenship education to 'less liberal societies'. However, it is important to note that this increasing emphasis on citizenship education as a process of empowerment also tends to fit modern sensibilities towards the limits of formal, liberal or linear approaches to education and political values. The concluding points in this paper reflect upon the difficulties of giving content to citizen education in today's complex and seemingly 'post-political' world (whether it is practiced domestically or understood as a set of exportable practices).

In a traditional framing, the democratic process itself was an education in citizenship as individuals joined and subordinated themselves to political parties and other collective social and political processes of contestation in order to achieve their aims. Today, it seems that the end of the contestation of Left and Right has left the formal political democratic process empty of meaningful engagement for many younger (and older) people. Citizenship education thereby can easily become an empty and artificial process of teaching formal

constitutional and rights laws and norms or a personal coping and life-realisation strategy of how to handle cooperation and contestation in the stresses and strains of everyday life. It is difficult to formally teach people the importance of democracy and participation in the political process when these processes appear alien and ossified and yet democracy also seems to be demeaned when it is reduced to handling personal questions of societal interaction. New citizenship education thereby tends to move beyond these traditional views of both the public and the personal. So how can people be taught or schooled in the importance of democracy?

Firstly, the need to teach people democracy already puts the cart before the horse. What is the problem with traditional understandings of democracy? Democracy is an empty formalism without democracy serving a purpose. There are two major problems here. To start with, the fact that democracy seems meaningless without a contestation over power – without something at stake in election debate and discussion; this is, no doubt, uncontroversial. More importantly, democracy and representative government seem much less relevant to our lives in a world of globalisation, interdependency and complexity. It seems that governments lack the power to direct social processes and instead need to be adaptive in managing social change. If this is the case, then teaching the importance of traditional forms of democracy becomes an empty gesture where voting itself counts more than what you might vote for and moral community counts for more than changing the world.

Secondly, what does democracy mean in a world of complexity where formal political processes are less important? Many would argue that we have a very different sort of democracy emerging: one in which there is no longer linear and distinct relationships from citizens up to the state and from the state down to the citizen: a democracy where our power and influence is much less directly and socially expressed and much less expressed through confrontation and cooperation. Politics becomes non-linear (much less about linear citizen-state relations and connections, and more about the indirect political agency generated through social interaction). As politics ossifies at the formal level it becomes much more important at the everyday level. However, this is not the democracy of participation as an active choice but the recognition of the social power and agency that all individuals have always and already as part of social processes which reproduce the world we live in – from family and peer-group interactions to shopping purchases and behavioural norms.

Thirdly, what are the traits and skills necessary when democracy becomes inevitably less about managing conflict than dealing with contingency? A democratic citizen is no longer one that is obedient to government or 'participatory' in elections and debates but in fact begins to bear very different traits. Whereas politics depended on debate and argumentation with the presumption that reasoned debate was a product of contesting firmly held viewpoints and would result in the best and most legitimate policy outcomes, our less contested and less political world requires a different type of openness. Rather than engaging and contesting the views of the 'Other', democracy appears to require an engagement with the views of the 'Self'. Fixed views and allegiances may be essential to politics as collective and social engagement but they are a barrier to flexible, open and adaptive understandings that are required in a faster, more fluid and more complex world. This is where tolerance comes in, as the importance of humility becomes central rather than the ability to contest an argument. It is often thereby held that having no views is better than having fixed and therefore reductionist and exclusionary, hubristic and dangerous certainties.

Teaching good citizenship and democracy in the context of post-political societies tends to focus on individual reflective capacities and self-awareness about relationships with others and the broader environment. It is through reflexively working on already existing relations that individuals believe they have the power to transform the world they live in rather than through joining collective movements or state-based projects for political change. This self-

awareness comes in many forms and is assisted through the growing datafication and technologisation of everyday life. People are thereby increasingly encouraged to become aware of their own agency over everything from their personal health to global warming based on knowledge of how much calories they consume, their environmental footprint and increasingly the broader indirect consequences of their 'human rights' footprint.

The shift from patronising and elitist views of citizenship education, which tended to blame peoples mindsets rather than consider the importance of the broader social and economic context in shaping possibilities, seems to have been overcome in more personalised views of citizenship education as a process of self-awareness and individual empowerment. However it should be noted that, whereas the first approach directly undermined democratic understandings of the rational and moral autonomy of individuals, the second approach indirectly undermines the growth of individual autonomy by subordinating the individual to their everyday relational experiences, encouraging the emptying out of the public sphere as one of reasoning and collective possibilities for social change.