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Different Meanings of Citizenship Education

Različni pomeni državljanske vzgoje

Abstract

The paper argues that there is a point of a key difference in understanding the concept of citizenship education, which subsequently determines the form of a particular curriculum and a corresponding practice of teaching and learning. What I mean by the "key difference" is a signifier under which one direction of formulation of the notion of citizenship education leads towards a vision of an autonomous individual and the other direction of formulation of the notion that leads towards a vision, which advocates a primacy of a community over individuals' rights and needs. This difference displays itself as a difference between a "traditional" approach to the problem, which solves the question of socialisation of young people in a form of the typical "civics" and a "post-modern" approach, which tries to rely on a reflexive and open concept invested with diversity, multiculturalism, etc. The first tendency relies on a more fixed idea of truth, the other relies on an assumption that the truth depends on being recognised as such by an individual, making the notion of truth much more a matter of a cognitive process within a social practice. However, it is probably difficult to find one or the other notion in any educational reality in a "pure" form – let us say, as a definitive "model" of a curriculum and/or an educational practice. Two points of difference mainly broadly shape a discursive space in which, we can watch a struggle for a definition of the citizenship education within each country and on the international scale. The concept of citizenship education has its roots in the universalistic ideas of the European enlightenment period. Obviously in many countries, that haven't yet embraced fully the "Western democracy," they take citizenship education as much more "cultural" than as a political notion. What may come out at the end of comparing different "values" and traditions that are supposed to determine the contents of the citizenship education, remains to be seen.

Key words: Citizenship education, discourse, curriculum, politics, human rights

Povzetek

Prispevek trdi, da obstaja točka ključne razlike v razumevanju državljanske vzgoje, ki posledično opredeljuje obliko posameznega kurikuluma in ustrezajoče prakse poučevanja in učenja. Kar mislim s »ključno razliko«, je označevalec glede na katerega ena smer formulacije pojma državljanske vzgoje vodi k viziji avtonomnega posameznika, druga smer pa vodi k viziji, ki zastopa nadrejenost skupnosti nad posameznikovimi pravicami in potrebami. Ta razlika se kaže kot razlika

med »tradicionalnim« pristopom k problemu, ki rešuje vprašanje socializacije mladih ljudi v obliki tipičnega vzgajanja državljana (»civics«) in med »postmodernim« pristopom, ki se skuša opirati na refleksivni in odprti koncept, ki stavi na raznolikost, multikulturnost itn. Prva težnja se zanaša na bolj fiksirano idejo resnice, druga pa na predpostavko, da je resnica odvisna od tega, da jo posameznik pripozna, kar pomeni, da je pojem resnice tako bolj stvar kognitivnega procesa v družbeni praksi. Vendar pa je verjetno težko najti prvi ali drugi pojem v vzgojnoizobraževalni stvarnosti v »čisti« obliki – recimo kot dokončni »model« kurikuluma in/ali pedagoške prakse. Dve točki razlike v grobem oblikujeta diskurzivni prostor, v katerem lahko opazujemo boj za definicijo državljanske vzgoje v vsaki deželi in v mednarodnih razsežnostih. Koncept državljanske vzgoje korenini v univerzalističnih idejah evropskega razsvetljenstva. Očitno v mnogih deželah, ki niso povsem sprejele »zahodne demokracije«, razumejo državljansko vzgojo veliko bolj kot »kulturni« kakor pa kot politični pojem. Kaj utegne biti izid primerjav med različnimi »vrednotami« in tradicijami, ki naj bi opredeljevale vsebine državljanske vzgoje, pa bomo še videli.

Ključne besede: državljanska vzgoja, diskurz, kurikulum, politika, človekove pravice

Introduction

There is hardly any other topic in approximately last decade and a half in educational sciences and practice, which is so extensively and profoundly discussed as the citizenship education. There are many reasons for this, which could be categorized as historical, political, social, cultural and maybe even as professional. The age of globalisation apparently became whatever it is due, among other reasons, to a community of a quite big number of experts in social sciences and humanities, who made it visible to the rest of society. The very same social group then takes care for a broad discussion on citizenship education. Of course, the existence of such professionals in most countries indicates a structural characteristics of modern societies in the age of globalisation. Considering that already in the earlier periods of industrial society education had become generally accessible, and considering that school systems took away a lot of family's and other narrow community's functions, these systems got targeted by enormous demands regarding the youth's socialisation. As the economic shifts make any life-long career in almost any vocation precarious, life-long education is becoming increasingly demanded from many positions in social space in most modern societies. Education becomes increasingly the utmost definite certainty in the age of widespread uncertainty in lives of modern citizens. Therefore, citizenship education also increasingly enters in a range of forms of adult education. Of course, the citizenship education makes only one part of the whole educational endeavour, although it seems that a purpose of education in general is expressed through it. We may take this reality as the manifestation of the type of society, that some contemporary sociologists (such as Giddens or Beck) determine as a "reflexive society." Obviously, as Neil Postman (1995) puts in his essay on "the end of education," public school is creating the public. Citizens of contemporary societies (with many deeply

distressing exceptions of the citizens of too many of the poor third world countries), are generally socialised by family and school. Institutions of education, which are expanding regarding their form, organisation, curriculum etc., make "school" a matter of almost never ending socialisation and re-socialisation. As one link of this bond of socialisation gets weaker, the public attention turns towards the other link, which is a common matter and therefore, a matter of politics. It is in this field that the current global debate (and also many "local" deliberations) on citizenship education is conducted. It looks like that the concept of citizenship education, which is very controversially understood as an education of autonomous individuals on one hand and as a kind of patriotic education on the other hand, is never really finally fully articulated. And we can be quite sure that it won't be any time soon, if ever. Still, any form of citizenship education on any level of schooling or education should be measured –regarding its "quality" and its sense in general – against a level of emancipation of individuals. This is the republican heritage, which isn't universally accepted but it looks like that many other forms of educating people into submissiveness are clearly visible as a violence or – in the best case – as indoctrination.

"The republican education… consists in an attitude of thought, which is problematising its own themes. The status of an individual is an essential knot of this questioning: it is marked by the attachment to a society, which is constituting him in his social nature. Simultaneously, he is conceived as a person, who has to tear from groups and traditions as he works toward his autonomy. In this perspective education consists of tensions between attachments and disassociations, initiated by the moral and political project of an universal emancipation of individual. (Dubreucq. 2004, p. 216)

In this paper, we won't really try to elaborate problems of citizenship education in so large scope. Such an attempt would require a much larger and detailed inquiry into relations in the field of education as a social activity. Nevertheless, one always must imagine some goal or purpose in education.

A global dialogue on citizenship education

Not long ago, the very notion of citizenship education didn't actually exist in the global context as it is most visibly represented by UNESCO as the world forum on matters of education, culture and science. From the early nineties the concept of citizenship education was introduced and debated within circles of educational and social scientists, who were deliberating on questions of differences between this new concept and "traditional civics." As we all know an important impetus has been given to liberal democracy due to the big social changes, to which we most often refer to

by evoking the fall of the Berlin wall. Since this event triggered a question on how to "build" democracy, and since no one was very sure about any definite answer, education was very early in the debate determined as THE answer. The very term of citizenship education was constructed within the context of this debate. Although very much quoted report of the international commission of UNESCO, which is widely known as the "Delors' report," didn't explicitly use the term, it did pave a way towards the international promotion of the citizenship education. Many aspects concerning citizenship education are visible throughout the book. Hence, in (from our perspective) the most relevant section of the whole report, we can find the subtitle "Civic education and the practice of citizenship," under the title "Democratic participation." In these brief but well thought out paragraphs, all the most widely known and considered elements, dilemmas, controversies and so forth, of citizenship education are mirrored. The part of the text, that we are talking about here, is centred by the notion of democracy in a way confirming an observation by Francis Fukuyama, who said that:

"a remarkable consensus concerning the legitimacy of liberal democracy as a system of government had emerged throughout the world, as it conquered rival ideologies like hereditary monarchy, fascism, and most recently communism." (Fukuyama. 1992. p. XI)

Delors' text sounds almost as if it applied this proposition to the notion of civic education:

"Preparation for active participation in the life of the community has become, for education, a more and more widely recognized task as democratic principles have spread throughout the world. There are, in that respect, several levels of action which, in a modern democracy, should complement one another." (Delors. 1996. p. 62)

There is one "little" point of difference between the two texts: as Fukuyama uses the term "liberal" democracy, Delors speaks only about democracy. Nonetheless, this is already an achievement for a text that was meant to become a kind of an universal educational platform and policy guidance for practically whole world. We must admit as well that the Delors' report transcends many limitations that were typical for such texts, both in a dimension of the intellectual articulation and in view of exploring the limits of political consensus. The chapter that we are discussing here starts with an assumption that education cannot be "satisfied" by getting individuals to "accept common values shaped in the past," and it concludes with a projection of a role of education in the "participatory democracy." Finally it assumes that such practice would go on in a "framework of civil society."

As much as the contribution of the Delors' report is encouraging, and as much it demonstrated its effectiveness, considering its influence on setting topics for the debate within UNESCO framework as well as outside of it, we may find that it still enables, what I would call "false equalizing" of different practices. As such, in view of citizenship education this report opens possibilities for an intercultural dialogue and by doing so it makes visible how different cultures (comprising social, political and religious orders) adapt meanings of key concepts to their supposed needs. Since UNESCO is an organization which more or less tends to create a common ground for a dialogue, it thus seeks agreements rather than disagreements. Therefore we may conclude this line of observation with a remark that in this framework, in this quite special "social space," we are bound to except differences, what we would find much less easier to tolerate in a local environment in contrast to a global one. Naturally, we cannot expect or, much less, demand any "unified" concept of citizenship education on the world scale taking into account both nature of the subject and vast diversity of historical, social and cultural situations in different countries. But, I would argue that there is a point of a key difference in understanding the concept, which subsequently determines the form of a particular curriculum and a corresponding practice of teaching and learning. What I mean by the "key difference" is a signifier under which one direction of formulation of the notion of citizenship education leads towards a vision of an autonomous individual, and the other direction of formulation of the notion that leads toward a vision, which envisages a primacy of a community (ethnic group, nation, state…) over individuals' rights and needs. This difference shows itself as a difference between a "traditional" approach to the problem, which solves the question of socialisation of young people in a form of typical "civics" education or even some religious and moral instruction, and a "post-modern" approach, which tries to rely on a reflexive and open concept, invested with diversity, multiculturalism etc. The first tendency relies on a more fixed idea of the truth, the other relies on an assumption that the truth depends on being recognised as such by an individual, making the notion of truth much more a matter of a cognitive process within a social practice. However, it is probably difficult to find one or the other notion in any educational reality in a "pure" form – let us say, as a definitive "model" of a curriculum and/or an educational practice. Two points of difference mainly broadly shape a discursive space in which, we can watch a struggle for a definition of the citizenship education within each country and on the international scale. Maybe the word "struggle" may sound too strong for what is basically a debate among educationalists, administrators and – not always – a general public. But, especially in those countries, where the historical, political, cultural and economic aspects of a particular social situation indicate a conflicting reality, any implementation of the curriculum of the citizenship education can be a matter of very fervent confrontations.

Local cultural contextualisation

Let me evoke an experience, which I share with a large number of participants in some events staged by UNESCO, such as World Conference on Education in Geneva in September 2001 and the General Conference of UNESCO in the same year. The first event happened before 11th September 2001 and the other started about a month later. Although the event in New York caused some shifts in emphases, practically all discussions that touched upon the subject agreed on a very big importance of global attention that happened to be paid to it by UNESCO. Citizenship education took a very important place on a list of global priorities in education in general almost on the same level as such worthy goals as "education for all" or "lifelong learning." Of course the topic of citizenship education continues to be one of the constant matters of interest not only for UNESCO but for a number of other international government and non-government organisations also in a number of combinations with the both just mentioned terms. When one attends such global conferences, he or she might be amazed how very different countries uphold a notion of citizenship education. However, it doesn't seem that the concept happens to be very clearly defined. Of course, in such a sizeable framework, as it is UNESCO's, it is difficult to expect any very precise definition, at least not in a sense of an obligatory term for voluntarily associated countries. As different opinions were given in usually short statements, it became quickly and tangibly visible that vastly different meanings have been attributed to the notion of citizenship education. When one is listening to such a debate, it is impossible to avoid comparing discourses of representatives of different countries to their respective realities (or what is perceived as a distinct social and political reality from other realities in other countries). One simply cannot imagine that, for instance, a delegate, say, from United Kingdom and a delegate from Saudi Arabia or Slovenia, really agree on what they claim to agree.

So, are therefore the deliberations, which UNESCO organizes in its framework, just an exercise in an empty rhetoric, which is without any connection to different social realities whatsoever? I would insist that this isn't the case. Considering the nature of UNESCO's discussions, which may well involve hundreds of interventions in one meeting consisting of a number of sessions (and these discussions aren't published in any form), I cannot quote anybody specifically, except myself. But this isn't so important for the point I am about to make. Although there was generally a high degree of agreeing between representatives of very different countries, it has been obvious that there are still vast differences in basic understanding of the main goal of the citizenship education. This goal comprises a contribution by the citizenship education as an aspect of education to a reproduction of human community in its different intersecting forms such as state, nation, ethnic identity etc. There is no doubt, that delegates actually have agreed upon the basic meaning of the concept concerning its role in reproducing a community, bearing in mind each societies cultural identity and whatever else might be attached to a representation of an identity. This "function" of the citizenship education, further on, can be given many attributes and, besides, it can be described as a tool of

"making a society better." I could go on and on describing these discourses in which a space of almost global understanding is created. However, as soon as any of important points of the citizenship education is mentioned, one may become instantly aware of differences in semantic nuances, which represent vast fields of political, social and cultural differences. Most obvious nuance in a difference, which can be observed is, for example, an attitude towards human rights. Delegates from some countries either tend to avoid the question altogether or sometimes they give it a special accent (which isn't so essential for the original concept of human rights) or, most often, they tend to emphasize the importance that pupils learn about "responsible citizenship," which means that they should understand a concept of individual's duty towards a society. Especially delegates from those countries, where religion or some church is playing a very visible role in private and public lives of citizens, tend to put a strong emphases on "ethics," which should be contained in the curriculum. Due to different and not so easily discernible reasons vocal claims for "ethics" in the curriculum were very frequently emphasized by representatives of former socialist countries, especially already a little while after the fall of the Berlin wall. Some specific positions of some countries, that are tackling problems due to their ethnic structures or territorial problems with neighbouring countries, are reflected in discourses that put a stress on the concept of identity and culture. And, as Henry Giroux points out, "the most important forms of domination are not simply economic but also cultural." (Giroux. 2005, p. 143) The concept of citizenship education is therefore far from a well defined, let alone universally unambiguously understood notion. But, I deem one fact to be important: namely the fact, that the notion is on the table in a global meeting open to scrutiny; it may not be unequivocally comprehended in the same way all over the world, but there is a trace of some universality in it, considering the fact that different people from vastly different cultural backgrounds from different countries are discussing it as if it is representing a common goal of humanity. This global dialogue must have some influence, although any encouraging results of each step forward in the direction of strengthening a role of citizenship education within the curriculum, can be quickly diminished by some political or economic developments. Human rights as the most important content of the citizenship education remain mostly too much open to different "cultural" contextualisations. As Claude Lefort said:

"Nothing rigorous can be said about politics of human rights until one has examined whether these rights have a properly political significance; and nothing can be said about the nature of the political that does not involve an idea of human existence or, what amounts to the same thing, of human co-existence." (Lefort. 1986, p. 240)

It is, therefore very clear that the citizenship education in local cultural, ethnic and political environment, can be judged upon only when we know how it is incorporated in the local politics. UNESCO's "international cultural, social and intellectual space" provides some opportunities for

member countries to compare their concepts and practices, it enables educational activists to confront some local politics of segregation and exclusion through a formulation of citizenship education curriculum, but we cannot expect very quick and universal results corresponding to the universal framework of the debate itself. This is only the most visible consequence that shows up, when we bring forward the liberal paradigm into a discussion on a concept of citizenship education. Also within many countries, that consider themselves to belong to the "Western world," a lot of problems appear around the concept of identity as applied to the citizenship education.

"The… attribute of citizenship, a sense of identity, is usually defined in national terms, though not necessarily exclusively so, since most countries acknowledge the existence of multiple and overlapping identities, be they local, ethnic, cultural, religious, or whatever. This is especially true in the case of societies that are multicultural in their composition. A sense of national identity and patriotism is usually seen as a fundamental ingredient of citizenship. Some commentators argue, however, that national citizenship alone will not be enough to meet the challenges of the 21st century as globalization take full effect. Rather, a multidimensional approach to citizenship education is needed as outlined in this chapter." (Cogan. 2000. p. 41)

This observation very clearly exposes the dilemmatic nature of citizenship education, when educators and administrators face a particular situation in a country's school system.

Conclusion: market society?

Can we then identify the signifier under which the above mentioned difference between concepts of the citizenship education is visible? In both directions we are led to two opposite ideas of a citizen. It would take as too far, if we tried to present a whole analysis of the notion of citizen. Therefore, let us just point out that the construction of the meaning of this notion stems from that period in the Western history, when the idea of a society, based on an association of free individuals, was formulated. It probably goes without saying, that this idea is associated with the tradition of liberalism and republicanism. Within this tradition that comprises many contributions of philosophers and political thinkers, such as John Lock, Thomas Hobbes, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, John Stuart Mill, Émile Durkheim and many others, we my say that the liberal democratic paradigm was created. No matter how these thinkers from the enlightened age differed, no matter how differently they might have had understood their concepts than we do today, their thinking is condensed today in a paradigm of freedom, of human rights and the state of law. The basic idea of a citizen as a free agency (limited only by the same freedom of others), which is one way or another formulated in their teachings, is the meaning of this paradigm. As we know, the liberal

thinkers were mostly intensely interested in education, seeing it as a most important tool of creating a free society. We won't enter here into discussion on how contradictory some of their theories were or what were they actually meaning, taking into account the colonial and patriarchal context, and so on. Nevertheless, the liberal paradigm makes the bases of the political system of liberal democracy. And just at the time of the greatest triumph of democracy in history, Fukuyama (1992), among others, pointed out the importance of the adjective "liberal," since there are existing political systems, which "technically" are democracies, but they lack the element of liberalism. Within such societies the image of a citizen is supposed to help reproduction of the system, that keeps human rights and civil liberties on a low level. Maybe we should remark here that the liberal paradigm as such plays its role as a concept, independently of many existing political parties that call themselves liberal, but quite often advocate a conservative ideology. The concept of free individual in the educational setting designates a goal of the educational work and, if taken seriously enough, this goal determines the approaches to the problem of educating such individual.

What the course of our analysis of the UNESCO framework brought us to, is just the extensive evidence of a stage, which the worldwide apprehension of the citizenship education has reached. Especially from the symbolically ascertained triumph of liberal democracy this education is supposed to provide answers to many challenges of the global world, including the governance in each country that makes part of such world. The concept of citizenship education has its roots in the universalistic ideas of the European enlightenment period. Obviously in many countries that haven't yet embraced fully the "Western democracy," they take citizenship education as much more "cultural" than as a political notion. What may come out at the end of comparing different "values" and traditions that are supposed to determine the contents of the citizenship education, remains to be seen. Undoubtedly it depends a lot on the ability of the trans-national agencies and organisations to conduct an open dialogue between what is perceived as different cultures or even civilizations. The aspect of religion, as we could better see after the fatal globally resonating terrorist act in New York on 11th September 2001, will make a difficult part of the whole dialogue. Of course, advocates of the "cultural particularity" have a point, since the universality of the notion doesn't entail a requirement for any global uniformity. But, I think that is arguably clear that lessening the importance or even omitting of the liberal paradigm in the foundation of the citizenship education, may cause an incompatibility of goals of different national curricula and may contribute to a continuation and even amplification of "cultural" gaps between citizens of different countries. In a dimension, in which the citizenship education should enable international understanding, we may look for such contents which potentially facilitate the intercultural communication on the grassroots level.

However, there are also other dimensions of the problem, which we should acknowledge whether we totally agree or disagree with the criticism, which brings forward these dimensions. The advancement of the so called neoliberal concepts on the global scale provokes many critical responses.

"As democratic values give way to commercial values, intellectual ambitions are often reduced to an instrument of the entrepreneurial self, and social visions are dismissed as hopelessly out of date. Public space is portrayed exclusively as an investment opportunity, and a public good increasingly becomes a metaphor for public disorder." (Giroux. 2005. p. 141)

As the author points out subsequently, such a development brings us to a situation in which "neoliberal" has power "both to depoliticize and disempower" (p. 142), he calls for a "new political and pedagogical language for addressing the changing contexts." In his view we should reject "a collapse of the distinction between market liberties and civil liberties, a market economy and a market society." (p. 142) This quotes may well illustrate that there is no easy way towards a citizenship education, which has any ambition to enable pupils to act in a society.

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