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Citizenship as a learning process

Disciplinary citizenship versus cultural citizenship

In the dominant liberal discourse on citizenship, learning processes have tended to be reduced to citizenship classes and formal membership of the polity. In an article first published in 2003, Gerard Delanty contrasts this type of "disciplinary citizenship" with a notion of "cultural citizenship". Delanty develops the notion of cultural citizenship in terms of learning processes at both the individual and collective levels; such processes, rather than merely demanding cognitive competence, have a developmental and transformative impact on the learning subject.

Introduction

In the last two decades, there has been a tremendous expansion in the discourse of citizenship. In one strand, perhaps the most well known one, communitarianism reshaped the notion of citizenship as a critique of the liberal concept of the citizen as the bearer of abstract rights. Building upon classical civic republicanism, communitarianism brought the idea of citizenship in a substantive direction with a view of the citizen as an active and engaged member of society. For some time, the debate about citizenship was dominated by the liberal versus the communitarian perspectives. In more recent times, especially in the 1990s, additional approaches emerged, ranging from radical pluralism to cosmopolitanism (Delanty 2000). Radical pluralism rejected the somewhat conservative premises of the liberal communitarian controversy, and advocated a more transformative view of citizenship that was also more deeply embedded in ideas of radical democracy. Allied to democracy, new ideas of democratic governance beyond the nation–state, such as global civil society, and related conceptions of cosmopolitanism, brought additional dimensions onto the citizenship agenda, which has now become a major area of social research (Isin and Turner 2002).

Central to this is the idea of cultural citizenship, the concern of this article. Citizenship is now seen as having a major impact on the cultural processes of society. In this, it is very different from the recent past when citizenship took for granted cultural questions and was, as in T. H. Marshall's famous theory, a discourse of stability by which the modern state could achieve a degree of integration by compensating for the inequalities of class (Marshall [1949] 1992). This limited role is now inconceivable for citizenship, which has become irreversibly part of the transformative discourses of contemporary society. It has entered new conceptions of multiculturalism and cultural rights more generally (Kymlicka and Norman 2000, Stevenson 2000, Cowan et al. 2001). In these new approaches to citizenship, the problem of inclusion has become more acute as it must address the problem of culture and identity. It is

possible to see a shift in emphasis away from a preoccupation with equality to a recognition of difference (Touraine 2000, Young 2002).

This last decade has also seen a governmentalization of the discourse of citizenship and community, which has become more and more a part of the nascent ideology of the Third Way (Delanty 2003). This wider societal turn to citizenship can be seen in part as a reaction to neoliberalism that, especially in the English-speaking world, dominated political discourse. The new ideas of citizenship, which have a strong resonance in third way politics, are different from the neoliberal idea of the individual as a consumer and older liberal notion of citizenship as a formal status. The emphasis is more on the duties of citizenship and engagement in civil society than on the traditional notions of rights. Undoubtedly, this has been connected with the revival of civil society theory and notions of empowerment. However, the governmental discourse has to a degree remained within the rights discourse, as is perhaps best illustrated by the example of European citizenship, as codified in the Maastricht Treaty.

It is in this context that the question of learning arises. The connection between learning and citizenship has become a highly topical issue in the last few years with many official initiatives for citizenship classes and learning civic values. The view is gaining widespread acceptance that citizenship is something that must be learnt and that rights must be accompanied by corresponding duties. However, the conceptualization of learning in this discourse is fraught with many problems, which will be identified in this article. Against the discourse of disciplinary citizenship that is implicit in the new governmental policies, an alternative conception of citizenship — cultural citizenship — is advocated.

The governmentalization of learning and citizenship

According to the UK Home Secretary, David Blunkett, "A political community can require new members to learn about its basic procedures and fundamental values" (*Guardian*, 26 October 2001). In what was seen by many critics and ethnic group leaders as an attack on multiculturalism, the Home Secretary argued for the introduction of US style citizenship classes with tests on language, history and culture for all immigrants wishing to apply for British citizenship. Mr Blunkett has continued to advocate the idea, believing it will impose a common public culture on all ethnic groups thus diluting allegedly non-western values and at the same time will overcome racial segregation in UK cities. These measures were also reflected in other developments in making citizenship a learning process. The Crick Report also planned on making citizenship a compulsory part of the secondary school curriculum from 2002. These measures will entail learning civic values such as that bullying is wrong, respect, understanding the workings of institutions such as the electoral and criminal justice system.

On 7 February 2002, the Home Secretary Blunkett presented the House of Commons with a White Paper entitled "Secure Borders, Safe Haven: Integration with Diversity in Modern Britain". "People will need to show they can speak the language reasonably well and have grasped the basics of citizenship. We have neglected such induction for too long", he argued (*Guardian*, 7 February 2002). The White Paper outlined the need for radical changes to the asylum system to ensure its effectiveness, fairness and integrity, but also plans on citizenship classes, including lessons in English, British politics and culture with the intention of making these classes compulsory for all immigrants wishing to take out British citizenship. There are also plans for a new oath to be taken by immigrants seeking British citizenship. It should be

noted that these measures relate to the acquisition of citizenship as naturalization and will not be compulsory — indeed, many refugees have good reasons for not wishing to acquire it.

The White Paper has met with a mixed reaction from various citizen and ethnic groups. The idea that citizenship entails duties as well as rights and moreover has a deeper civic dimension that entails acceptance of common values is not something that is detrimental to multiculturalism. While the Home Secretary has been in part inspired by the need for a genuine citizenship policy, in other contexts citizenship classes have been more explicit, as in the Austrian proposal to have a compulsory cultural programme for immigrants. The Austrian government, which is composed of a coalition of the conservative People's Party and the extreme right Freedom Party — are proposing to force all immigrants to take compulsory German language lessons and citizenship values. Clearly, such measures are not merely for the dissemination of German culture but have a disciplinary function. This disciplinary dimension is also not entirely absent from the UK government's plans.

That there has been a "governmentalization" of citizenship as a learning process seems evident from such developments. In this Foucauldian sense of governmentalization, I mean to indicate that there has been a certain discursive coding of citizenship as a cognitive competence. In this discourse, citizenship is constructed by codes, categories and modes of classification that reflect a governmental strategy into which the individual as citizen is inserted. Thus, the immigrant becomes a citizen by participating in a discourse that redefines social relations according to fairly fixed categories. What is noticeable in this is that the language of citizenship and learning is taken over by the state and defined according to a set of rigid categories. The assumption, then, is that learning citizenship entails the learning of the official values of the polity and as interpreted by public officials. While it can hardly be denied that such policies can be beneficial and can enhance multiculturalism, there is the danger that in addition to having a disciplinary function they reduce learning processes to formal learning. One might quite well wonder how individual learning processes would convert into a collective learning. Presumably, the Home Secretary had something like this in mind, but had not considered the fact that no number of individual learning processes will amount to a collective learning outcome for the wider society. Collective learning processes operate on quite different levels and the relation between individual and collective learning is complex.

The remainder of this article will explore a different conception of learning and its relation to citizenship. It will be argued that a notion of cultural citizenship is preferable to the discourse of disciplinary citizenship that is implicit in governmental policies. We need to move to a more dynamic view of citizenship as entailing developmental processes of learning rather than the fixed, rule learning model implicit in disciplinary citizenship.

Theorizing learning processes

Any discussion about learning must begin with the recognition that learning occurs on different levels and that there are quite different kinds of learning. The way individuals learn is quite different from the way societies learn. Let us begin by addressing the question of what learning is and how individuals learn.

Despite the rise of evolutionary psychology, most theories of learning today have moved beyond behavioural approaches. In the main approaches, learning

is connected with the experience of contingency. In the terms of Luhmann's systems theory, it is a reaction to uncertainty and takes the form of self-construction, or *autopoiesis*. The aim of learning is the reproduction of a system. Complexity theory, itself influenced by systems theory, also sees learning as the attempt to reduce complexity in a situation of radical uncertainty. In rational choice theory, there is a similar assumption that individuals learn to maximize their preferences in a situation where choices have to be made under conditions of insufficient information. In these approaches, learning is rule learning but of a non-behavioural nature. Thomas Kuhn, in a different context, argued scientists learn how to solve problems but not how to innovate. In the Kuhnian approach, learning occurs within paradigms and is cumulative in history. Kuhn effectively presupposed a notion of collective learning in the history of science.

Against Kuhn's reluctant concession to universalism, Habermas has argued that learning occurs simply because not-learning is not possible. In this approach, which is influenced by the cognitive and developmental psychology of Jean Piaget and Laurence Kohlberg, learning is the fundamental human trait and contains cognitive processes that cannot be reduced to rule learning or coping with the constraints of the external environment. Habermas has argued that the evolution of societies can be theorized in terms of the transformation of their cognitive complexes, moral consciousness and cultural systems. Thus, what is salient in this approach is learning as the capacity to learn, or learning how to learn. In addition, there is recognition that learning also entails the development and transformation of cognitive structures.

In mainstream sociological theory, it has been long held that learning occurs through patterns of socialization in the informal structures of everyday life and also via the formal structures of education. Such approaches strongly emphasized the linkages of individual and collective or societal learning processes. In Parsonian structural functionalism, such linkages were secured by the cultural system and were ultimately anchored in the "societal community".

In view of the variety of conceptions of learning that are to be found in modern social thought, the term learning must be used with some circumspection. So what then is learning? I would like to propose a few tentative ideas. Learning entails cognitive processes that allow information to be combined in different ways to provide a subject — individual, a group, a society — to have a capacity for action. Learning may therefore entail learning to learn and thus a certain reflexivity, as in for example consciousness of learning, storing, retrieving, selecting and processing information. In this way, learning entails empowerment or the capacity of a subject to reproduce itself. To be emphasized, then, is the processual nature of learning, which is an open process defined in movement rather than in finality. This view of learning suggests a cultural dimension to it; that is, culture as a making or a doing. Learning involves agency on the part of the learning subject. The cognitive structures operate in learning processes connect different frames and codes. Learning is thus a cultural process of creation and construction.

It is important to see the learning component not just in individual terms but also as a medium of social construction by which individual learning becomes translated and co-ordinated into collective learning and ultimately becomes realized in social institutions. What is decisive in this is collective learning, which cannot be reduced to individual learning. In an insightful article on learning processes, Eder argues: "Learning changes either basic normative frames and beliefs that guide social action or the empirical knowledge of the

world used as a resource in social action" (2001: 203). What is learnt on the collective level is very different from on the individual level. Again, drawing on Eder's argument, which is derived from Habermas's social theory of evolution and cognitive development: "The question is now what is learnt is narratively ordered situations which provide structure to social relations. Thus the institutionalization of knowledge has to be looked at, i.e. the production of knowledge and of social forms that collect and retain such knowledge beyond the capacity of individual memory" (Eder 2001: 203, see also Habermas 1979). Eder thus has in mind a differentiated conception of learning.

Building on Eder's arguments, a differentiated view of learning would thus see it occurring on three levels. Firstly, it occurs on the level of the individual's biography. This might be in self-knowledge, in interpersonal learning, in the construction of a personal narrative, etc. Secondly, learning occurs on the cultural level of collective learning where cultural narratives, symbolic forms and cognitive models provide interpretations of the world. This is a two-way process, as the cognitive achievements of the individual have to be translated into the cognitive forms on the one side and on the other individuals learn from the already existing cognitive forms of culture. Thirdly, there is the further social level on which the cultural learning level has to be embodied in an institutional form. It is on this level that evolution or social change occurs.

The relations between these three levels are complex and have not been fully worked out in social theory (see Habermas 1979; Miller 1986; Strydom 1987, 1992, 1993; Eder 1999). The following can be said to be the most important mapping mechanisms by which the different levels relate to each other:

- process — learning entails a movement; it is not static or simply reproductive, but generative;
- connectivism — learning occurs by connecting different concepts, discourses, information rather than occurring within a closed paradigm;
- development — the "processual" nature of learning leads to a development in competencies. In this sense, it is possible to speak of learning as entailing evolution as change;
- construction — the developmental nature of learning suggests a process of construction going on; and
- transformation — learning entails the potential transformation of the learning subject.

For present purposes, this tentative theorization of learning will suffice, since my aim is to explore the idea of cultural citizenship as a learning process.

Cultural citizenship as a learning process

What has hopefully emerged out of the foregoing analysis is a view of learning as processual and connective, but differentiated into different levels and which have overall a transformative impact on the learning subject, which can be an individual or society. I have argued for some recognition of the different nature of individual and collective learning processes, arguing individuals and collectivities learn in different ways. Making the connection with citizenship, my contention is that citizenship is a learning process.

The advantage of theorizing cultural citizenship as a learning processes is that it shifts the focus of citizenship away from the fact of membership of a polity onto common experiences, cognitive processes, forms of cultural translation and discourses of empowerment. The power to name, create meaning,

construct personal biographies and narratives by gaining control over the flow of information, goods and cultural processes is an important dimension of citizenship as an active process. What I want to stress in this regard is the *learning* dimension of citizenship and to see this as a *constructivist* process. Research has documented how citizens learn citizenship, which mostly takes place in the informal context of everyday and life and is also heavily influenced by critical and formative events in people's lives. Citizenship is not entirely about rights or membership of a polity, but is a matter of participation in the political community and begins early in life. It concerns the learning of a capacity for action and for responsibility but, essentially, it is about the learning of the self and of the relationship of self and other. It is a learning process in that it is articulated in perceptions of the self as an active agency and a social actor shaped by relations with others. In this view, citizenship concerns identity and action; it entails both personal and cognitive dimensions that extend beyond the personal to the wider cultural level of society. It is possible to relate this understanding of citizenship to "life-long learning", as citizenship is an on-going process that is conducted in communicative links.

As a learning process, citizenship takes place in communicative situations arising out of quite ordinary life experiences, but it can also arise out of major crises and catastrophes such as the experience of victimhood or injustice. It appears that an essential dimension of the cognitive experience of citizenship is the way in which individual life stories are connected with wider cultural discourses. Margaret Somers has described this as the narrative model of citizenship, for citizenship is sustained by narratives, both individual and collective, and consists of memories, shared values and experiences (Somers 1995).

I see this as a cognitive dimension in that citizenship is experienced as a practice that connects individuals to their society but in ways that are ultimately unclear and far-reaching. What I think is interesting is this cognitive dimension to citizenship, which goes beyond the institutional dimension of both rights and participation. We need more information, as well as theoretical tools, for understanding the cognitive dimension of citizenship. However, for present purposes it will suffice to note that one of the most important dimensions of citizenship concerns the language, cultural models, narratives, discourses that people use to make sense of their society, interpret their place in it, and construct courses of action.

The task of citizenship, as I see it, is to assist in enhancing the collective learning capacity of society. In this view, cultural citizenship has a transformative role to play not just in enhancing the cognitive competencies of the individual, but also in bringing about collective learning, which is always more than the aggregate of the learning of individuals.

It is in this context that the further connection of citizenship with strategies to oppose racism and xenophobia can be made. Much of the problem of widespread xenophobia is due to failures in learning mechanisms and can be counteracted by encouraging active, cultural citizenship that can lead to a transformation of the cultural models that constitute collective learning. My argument is the future of citizenship as a strategy to oppose xenophobia will have to cultivate what might be called a new language, or cognitive structures for learning. Only by generating a more discursive citizenship can the demoralization of life and social pathologies be overcome (Febrve 2000). Institutions cannot offer new models of social integration when the foundations of citizenship are absent or seriously disintegrated. The increase in

demoralization, depression, suicide, stress, drug dependency, xenophobia and violence has led to a situation in which people no longer have a common language in which to communicate their experiences of deprivation, disrespect and the absence of "recognition". This has been argued by Honneth (1996, 2002), Bourdieu et al. (1999), Fraser (Fraser and Honneth 2003) and Sennett (1998, Sennett and Cobb 1972) for whom the task is to create a new "habitus" or language in which collective experiences can be articulated. According to Bourdieu, the desire for recognition is one of the most basic features of social life. His sociology emphasizes the "symbolic violence" that comes from "mis-recognition". While Bourdieu stresses symbolic struggles over cultural capital, others such as Sennett and Honneth have taken the question of recognition in a different direction and one that is fruitful for the idea of citizenship as a discourse of empowerment. Sennett and Honneth, in different ways, have demonstrated that many people's experiences of life, especially relating to the world of work in the flexible economy, have made them feel superfluous, with which goes a feeling of an absence of recognition. The result of this loss in recognition is, it may be suggested, the source of much of xenophobia.

While this can be amplified by more overt racist ideologies and political organizations, a great deal of research indicates that much of the electoral support the extreme right draws on is more one of political and social dissatisfaction than ideological racism. The rise of Third Way politics has created an ideological vacuum that is filled by xenophobic fears and are amplified by the extreme Right. However, the extreme Right ultimately rests on a fragile "discourse coalition" that can easily be challenged (Delanty and O'Mahony 2002). As stated earlier, xenophobia is to be understood as an expression of social fears rather than residing in essentially cultural discourses. While it is very often supported by cultural prejudices — such as the ordinary (and not so ordinary) ethnocentrism — that is to varying degrees part of most national cultures, the argument is that xenophobia can be challenged and counteracted by an active citizenship. In this sense, then, citizenship must go beyond a rights discourse to address more participatory and, more importantly, moral and cognitive issues.

Creating discourses for the expression of communicative competencies would appear to one of the main challenges facing the revival of citizenship today. As a communicative medium, citizenship is still an important source of articulating less shared values than moral experiences. In order to build up self-esteem, selfrespect and autonomous human beings, citizenship needs to be more discursively mobilized. Citizenship must be able to give voice to personal identities, rather than being seen as a cultural expression of collectivities or spatial categories to be organized into recipients of state services. This is more than a task of citizenship as a means of coping with diversity alone; it is also an active learning process. It concerns the task of learning to give new definitions to work, social relations, and the material environment. As a consciousness-raising discourse, in which flexibility might be challenged by reflexivity, citizenship can become an important means of cognitive transformation of self and other.

The argument put forward here is that culture and citizenship must be seen as connected in a cognitive relationship by which learning processes in the domain of citizenship are transferred to the cultural dimension of society. Cultural citizenship needs to be tied more closely to discourses of recognition in order to empower people in their own self-understanding, sense of belonging and identity.

Perhaps this is the chance for a new definition of European cultural identity. Until now, European identity has been defined in ways that do not address the question of belonging and of citizenship more generally. It has in general been conceived in highly cultural terms — the idea of European civilization — or as technocratic discourse, as in for example the "acquis communautaire". Indeed, much of the interest in the European cultural identity has been inspired by the need for the EU to construct a strong identity in order to demarcate itself from the outside, as in, for example, the Copenhagen 1973 Declaration on European Identity. Inevitably, this has led to a divisive kind of identity, which has been internally reproduced in defensive identities (Delanty 1995).

Unless "Europe" can articulate a vision of society, it will not be able to offer any resistance to the rising tide of xenophobia. This is particularly the case as the EU grows in size in the coming decade. Neither disciplinary policies of citizenship nor moral arguments alone are insufficient to counteract xenophobia. It also needs to be stated that arguments for the recognition of cultural diversity alone will not be adequate. The proposal made in this paper is that European cultural identity might be tied more closely to discourses of belonging. By making citizenship more discursive, some of the sentiments that tend to support xenophobia might be dissipated. Common ground, like social integration more generally, in complex societies such as the EU can only be communicative rather than being based on a form of life, on markets or even on the simple fact of pluralization. Anti-racist values do not simply exist in an already developed form, requiring merely their transmission into the minds of people. It is in this respect that citizenship must be seen as a learning process that occurs on the cultural level of society and is not merely, therefore, an educative process as might be indicated by notions of life-long learning.

Conclusion

In this paper, a view of citizenship has been advocated that differs strongly from the dominant liberal discourse of citizenship that has more recently become indistinguishable from what has been called the disciplinary citizenship implicit in recent official policy documents. The article has identified learning as a key dimension of citizenship. Against disciplinary citizenship, the argument has led to a notion of cultural citizenship conceived of in terms of learning processes that have a developmental and transformative impact on the learning subject.

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