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Children's Citizenship, Education and Europe-moving beyond rights to embrace respect and recognition

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Introduction

Written just as I start my PhD fieldwork this is a reflexive account that explores the idea that citizenship might be a useful lens for evaluating the evolving EU Children's Rights Strategy using one of my previous research projects on children's rights in education (Aspinwall, Crowley and Larkins 2003).

The EU Children's Rights Strategy can been seen as starting with the inclusion of children's rights in the European Charter of Fundamental Rights (2000) and is being developed through a Communication from the Commission (2006), and the Parliament's Response to this (2008). With a consultation paper due out in 2009, children's NGOs[i] are busy lobbying the EU to ask that this strategy be built on the principles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989 (UNCRC) they are also welcoming developments, such as the inclusion of Children's Rights in the Treaty of Lisbon, as promising citizenship to children (Euronet 23.10.07). This raises the question of what kind of citizenship the EU will offer children? A question which is made more stark by observations such as Ross (2003) that the European citizenship needs to be 'less ethnocentric, more diverse, more inclusive'.

Any definition of EU citizenship will directly affect all children in the EU and according to article 12 of the UNCRC and there is a requirement to provide children with the opportunity to contribute their opinions to this debate. To date, however, there is very little empirical research with children and young people that addresses children's aspirations for rights or citizenship to EU level.[ii] In the absence of such research, and in preparation for my PhD fieldwork[iii], this paper explores whether citizenship is a useful lens through which to consider children's relationship with the EU drawing on literature and an example of my past research. In the analysis represented in this paper, I am following a critical realist process for theory building, which involves reviewing literature and completed empirical work in order to start synthesising a new theoretical understanding (Mayall 2002; Porter 2002).

I begin the paper by outlining the theoretical and policy context in which this research is set and then give a brief account of the research methods of the Listen Up Education Research (Aspinwall, Crowley and Larkins 2003). Taking the most important rights, as identified in the research, I question extracts of the data to explore which concepts and building blocks related to citizenship are present. I then briefly note whether these building blocks of citizenship might be useful in understanding appropriate action at EU level.

Context

Children are recognised internationally in the UNCRC. Exploring children's experience through the lens of the UNCRC can provide some useful understandings (Osler 2000) but because Neale suggests:

> *Seeing children through the lens of their citizenship gives a very different picture of their place in the social world. Here they are recognised as young people with strengths and competencies. (Neale 2004: 8).*

Before we can determine whether a citizenship lens is useful, however, I suggest we need greater clarity on what children's citizenship might be. There is general agreement that all citizenship definitions relate to various combinations of the building blocks of rights, status, responsibilities, membership, participation; and key concepts such as agency/autonomy, equality and justice (Lister 2007; Delanty 2000). There are also a number of models that are frequently applied to children, and I explore three prominent examples of these below: lived citizenship, global rights based citizenship and difference-centred citizenship.

The model of citizenship that informs current education policy, suggests that children are citizens in waiting needing the completion of education in order to meet the standard of citizenship (Osler & Starkey 2006). The suggestion that children are not actually citizens, nor should they be, draws heavily on developmental models of childhood, that stress childhood as a time of formation but citizenship is now claimed for children on the grounds that there is no natural basis for the exclusion of the social category

'child' from citizenship (Lee 2001). Drawing justifications from new sociology of childhood perspectives, actual (rather than eventual) or lived citizenship (Lister 2007) is claimed for children on the grounds that they are active social agents; have experiences and qualities relating to all building blocks of citizenship; and deserve an improved or equal status (e.g. Cockburn 1998; James & James 2004; Jans 2004; Moosa-Mitha 2005; Wyness 2005).

The global rights based model of citizenship, popular with NGOs, draws on the UNCRC recognition of children as rights holders (e.g. Doek 2008). The value of UNCRC *alone* as a basis for children's citizenship is however debatable. As an international human rights instrument, it is distant from state citizenship mechanisms by which structural inequalities might be redressed (Isin & Turner 2007). The UNCRC ascribes a lower status to children than to adults, by allowing adults to rule that children's views may be ignored if they are judged immature or if their ideas are held to be not in their best interests (Invernizzi & Milne 2005). Further, the UNCRC provides rights but does not adequately describe the content of other building blocks of citizenship, particularly their responsibilities. The UNCRC can therefore been seen as the beginning, not the achievement, of children's citizenship (Roche 1999).

Even when formal equality of status between citizens is granted through global rights, difference can remain in, for example, economic and social experience. This is especially true when citizenship provisions do not accommodate the structural nature of pre-existing inequalities such as ethnic origin and class (Moosa-Mitha 2005). To redress this difference-blind deficit of universality in citizenship, certain theorists add claims for recognition to definitions of citizenship (Honneth 2001; Fraser 2001) and these perspectives have been seen as particularly useful for developing difference centred models of children's citizenship (Moosa-Mitha 2005; Lister 2007).

It seems likely, from this brief review of literature, that a wider notion of citizenship than rights alone might be a useful lens through which to explore children's experience and aspirations. Is this reflected in children's descriptions of their experience? In the next section, I consider what concepts and building blocks connected with citizenship I observe in the discussions of rights in the Listen Up Education Research. I then briefly explore whether these concepts and building blocks might be useful in understanding appropriate action at EU level.

The Listen Up Education Research

Methods

The research was a participatory action research project (Kirby 1999): I conducted the fieldwork, but my work was guided by a steering group of 8 young people who, within the limitations of the research aims set by Save the Children, directed the questioning and designed the consultation techniques. At the end of the fieldwork the reference group examined all the findings, suggested themes and essential quotes, drew out key recommendations and contributed to the design of the report. They also participated in the report launch and presented their recommendations to the Wales Minister for Education.

The fieldwork was conducted with 170 children and young people aged 9-15 (85% of who were in the target age range aged 9-13). The children were recruited through mainstream schools and youth groups purposively sampled to ensure representation of Gypsy Traveller and Black and Minority Ethnic experiences. Whole classes were asked to participate so that teachers could not select only 'more able' children. Children's written consent was obtained at the beginning of each session and children were reminded that they could leave the research sessions at any time.

Through participatory focus groups we used the UNCRC as a tool for evaluating children's educational experience. I ran two participatory research sessions with each group. In the first session we asked them to choose what rights are important for them in school and asked broad questions which had previously been successful in eliciting children's views, particularly 'what makes a good / bad teacher'. The reference group then looked at the transcripts from the first sessions and designed a format for the second meeting. This enabled the children and young people participating in each group to decide their own themes and then discuss their most important rights in more depth.

Findings

For the children and young people who participated in the research, the experience of rights in education was variable, but there was remarkable consistency in the rights that were voted as the three most important. These were: play or associating with friends; discrimination; and being listened to. I explore extracts from these three themes where the children are talking about rights, to reflect on what other concepts or building blocks related to citizenship I note in their discussions. My suggestions on these are marked in **bold**. I also explore specifically the possibility of a building block based on the concept of recognition (Fraser 2001, Honneth 2001) central to difference centred models of citizenship.

Friendship and Play

A mixed group of boys and girls aged 9 and 10 in an English language primary school talked about wanting more playtime. In this extract they explained why it was important:

> *'You have been inside doing your work then you go outside and run round and forget your work and feel energetic.'*
>
> *'You are all tired and you can get your concentration back.'*
> …
>
> *'You get your concentration back and your energy and then you work better after.'*

They are requesting a wider application of their right to play but I suggest they also identify that play enables them to better perform their responsibility of working at school. They are talking therefore about the building block rights, and responsibilities and a process of access.

In this excerpt, three girls aged 11 at a Welsh language secondary school talk about friendship:

> *'We think that it's really important to have friends because you can have fun with them – you can go shopping with them or go to football matches'*
>
> *'Some people refuse to be friends with people because they live in different houses. Some people live in small houses and some people live in mansions. We think that this needs to be sorted out.'*
>
> *'Without friends you wouldn't have a life. Life would be boring. In school, if you need to borrow glue or a pen, they can help you. They sometimes can be more important than family.'*

For me, this is a conversation again about access, but this time about how group belonging can provide access to resources and opportunities to obtain leisure rights. When I now reflect on these girls' conversations about friendship, it seems to me that they are talking not only about rights but also membership and structural differences.

Bullying and Discrimination

The most extensive comments on bullying related to racism. One Gypsy Traveller group (2 boys aged 13 and 15 and two girls aged 12 and 13), describe in the conversation below, the bad things that happen at their school:

> *'We get bullied at school' 'All the kids pick on us'*
> *'Teachers blame us for when things go wrong.'*
> …
> *'One teacher in Maths kicked someone in the back of his chair just because he didn't understand what was going on. It really hurt him. Someone told the other teacher and she said well he deserved it for what he was doing. She didn't do anything.'*

The group of boys (aged 10-15) from Black and minority ethnic communities choose to talk about the right to enjoy their own culture, practice your own religion, and use your their language. This was the ensuing conversation between four of them:

> *' [THE TEACHER] says dark coloured people are yellow. He picks on one person because of their colour.'*
> …
> *'Some of the teachers say like 'why did you have two days off for Eid' or something like that, and if they take two weeks off for Christmas, why can't we take two days off for Eid?'*
>
> *'One teacher said if any Muslims take the mick out of you, tell them 'At least I don't pray like a bull'.*
>
> *'She's the one who goes on about religion. She doesn't **say** much about Muslims. She says like a rude comment if you have a black face. And if she says something like that you've got the right to say something back, and she throws stuff at you as well, books. And she throws chairs.'*

From these comments I suggest that these children and young people are talking about the attitude of discrimination, and call for their difference to be recognised through a specific right to time off at Eid.

In contrast some young people asked to be treated the same, with comment such as this one from the 12 year old girl in a Gypsy Traveller youth group:

> *'They think that we are Travellers then we are different. But we are not different, we are just Travellers. We're still people like everyone else.'*

One young man from the Black and minority Ethnic group described mistrust and judgement as attitudinal barriers to parity of participation in enjoying responsibilities:

> *'Sometimes teachers treat us badly and judge people's religions, … [they] don't give an opportunity like, 'Who wants to run an errand?'.*
> *And they look at you and say, 'Definitely not you. I don't trust you'.'*

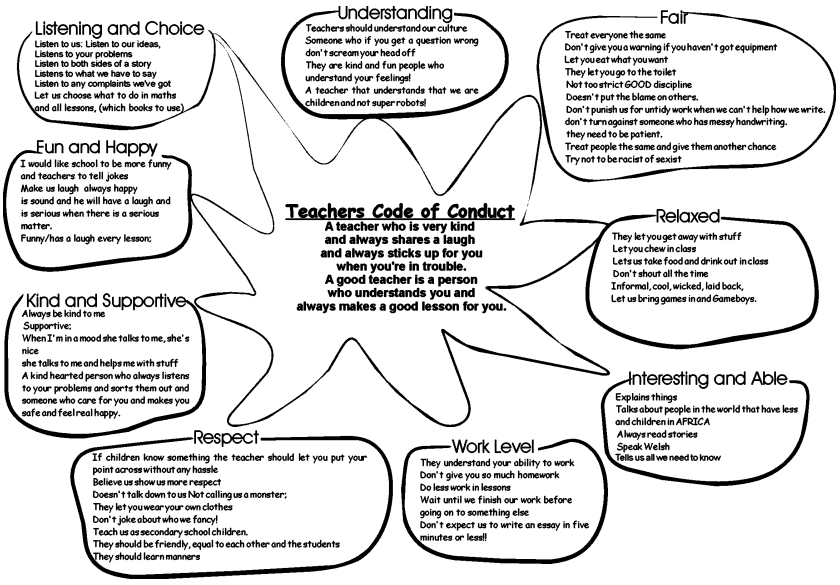
For me, these comments on the racism that young people in this group experienced from their teachers speak of an ethno-centrism and identity based discrimination. They suggest that inequality of status and access to the enjoyment of responsibilities can result from discriminatory attitudes, even when legal rights profess equality. For this reason it seems appropriate to consider adding to children's citizenship the possibility of a building block based on Fraser's status recognition, which aims to:
'de-institutionalize patterns of cultural value that impede parity of participation and to replace them with patterns that foster it' (2001:25)

Being listened to

Being listened to, a core element of the building block participation, was a consistently important right across the groups and judging from these examples from different schools, in some cases children were not listened to with regard to the bullying they experienced.

> *'I told a teacher that kids were bullying me and she said 'It doesn't matter'!'*
> *(boy 12)*
>
> *'They [teachers] say, 'If it happens again come back to see us…'*
> *Then, if it does, and we go back to them, they say: 'Well, we can't do that much about it'.'*
> *(girl 10)*

I asked children and young people to draw what makes a good teacher and the young people's research steering group worked with these findings to produce a list, which we developed as a code of conduct for teachers.
(Aspinwall, Crowley and Larkins 2003)



Each bubble contains examples of what they meant by: Kind and Supportive, Understanding, Respect, Work Level, Interesting and Able [Teachers], Fair, Listening and Choice, Relaxed, Fun and Happy. I suggest that all of these themes might be among the experiences that children might suggest should inform their citizenship in general, as well as their education. For me they also echo an element of Honneth's (2001) formulation of recognition that includes love, conceived as 'affective acceptance and encouragement'.

In asking for teachers who are Fair, who apply appropriate Work Levels and who Listen and Give Choice, the children in this research could also be seen for example, as requesting justice and participation**.**

Summary of Findings
From just these few extracts we can see that, even when being asked to talk about rights, these children are talking about other elements of citizenship:

Responsibilities
Access / Resources / Opportunities / Structural differences / Membership
Attitudes / Justice / Respect
Being listened to / Participation,
Recognition as parity and love / Recognition of difference and sameness

The appearance of these concepts, intertwined with and generated by their discussion of rights, seems to confirm Neale's (2004) suggestion that citizenship is a useful lens. Given that they talk about more than rights, it is possible that a model of citizenship that moves beyond rights to consider status, lived experience and recognition might be more useful lens than the UNCRC alone for exploring children's experiences. But, is such a model of citizenship a relevant way to explore EU actions that impact on children?

The EU Children's Rights Strategy

In this section I briefly consider the evolving EU Children's Rights Strategy to see whether it links to the rights priorities identified in the Listen Up Education Research namely Friendship and Play; Bullying and Discrimination; Being Listened to. Within each of these areas I then consider whether the EU proposals take account of the citizenship concepts identified above.

Friendship and Play

The European Parliament Resolution acknowledges children's rights to play and calls on member states to provide accessible affordable facilities. The Resolution acknowledges structural barriers to friendship and calls on the EU to ensure that the poorest children can also benefit from opportunities to associate with others in its community programmes and to receive support from NGOs. In these propositions, the EU parliament is therefore acknowledging the presence of issues of access/resources/structural differences, though they place the responsibility for addressing these at member state level.

Bullying and Discrimination

EU support for non-discrimination was laid down in the Treaty of Amsterdam and most recently in respect of children in Article 1(4) of the Treaty of Lisbon. Children's experience of racism is mentioned in the Strategy. The Resolution calls for measures on Roma inclusion, particular attention to the needs of immigrant children, and for integration strategies addressing the social inclusion of minorities. In this context the EU is providing rights and recognising that special measures are needed to support parity of social participation. However, as attempts to construct a European identity tend to allude to racial or religious distinctions (Dunkerley 2003) and EU economic and migration practices serve to legitimate racism (Yuval Davis 1992), the process of European integration could also be seen as reinforcing structural inequalities. It is particularly important therefore that any strategies for an inclusive citizenship address these issues of structural difference and group membership in a wider sense.

Being listened to

The right to be heard is already included in Article 24 of the Charter of Fundamental Human Rights, but it includes the caveat that children's 'views shall be taken into consideration on matters which concern them in accordance with their age and maturity.' So, as with the UNCRC, adults can judge children insufficiently mature to be taken seriously and participation is offered but not on the basis of equality. Participation and the Status of children are therefore potential elements of debate in children's citizenship in the EU.

Conclusion

My point in writing this paper was to explore whether thinking about children's citizenship in relation to the EU would be a useful approach in evaluating what the EU can offer children. From the reflections contained in this paper, I believe that citizenship is a useful lens through which to explore children's citizenship but this is a belief that needs further testing. It seems apparent, at least, that the model of citizenship based solely on the rights contained in the UNCRC is not enough. Any model of children's citizenship in the EU, and elsewhere, also faces a clear challenge of determining how to deal with discrimination and structural inequalities. The next step in my PhD research, is to test these beliefs by engaging marginalised children, who experience identified structural inequalities, in research to develop a model of citizenship. I will then use this to evaluate the children's policy emerging from the EU.

In contrast to the drafting of the UNCRC where children were not involved, I am suggesting that the principle of parity of participation should be accorded to children in the drafting of the EU agenda on children's rights and the Parliament Resolution makes a similar suggestion. The action element of my PhD will also provide ways in which children participating in research can be heard in this process at local and EU levels. In the light of the young person's comment above that that even when some teachers listened about bullying they say 'It doesn't matter', should the EU Commission choose to allow participation to children on this issue, a significant test of the citizenship the EU are offering children will be judged by the extent to which the Commission allows children's participation and their views to matter and result in any changes they request.

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[i] As represented in the European Children's Network EURONET, which regroups UK and other EU member state charities such as the NSPCC and Save the Children Europe.

[ii] One such research project was Olle 2002, but even now, a year later as I revise this paper, there is still very little research of this kind (Stalford and Drywood 2009).

[iii] My PhD research will explore this question in detail through participatory action research with six groups of marginalised children, aged 8-12 and the fieldwork will take place between May 2008 and February 2009.