

Children's identity and citizenship in Europe: an Erasmus academic network project

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Abstract

This paper reports on the activities of CiCe (Children's Identity and Citizenship in Europe), an Erasmus Academic Network, funded by the European Commissions' Lifelong Learning Programme. The Network links Higher Education institutions concerned with citizenship education and the development of identities in young people. Our partners are in teacher education; and, the education of social pedagogues, youth workers, early childhood workers, sociologists and social psychologists. CiCe brings debates around citizenship and identity to the education of these and other professionals who teach or work with young people as they develop new and multiple identities in a 'Europe of difference'. Networking activities support lecturers in higher education by providing a forum for the sharing of practice, discussion and development. We also produce and widely disseminate a range of materials, including discussion papers on relevant issues; materials for teaching and learning; and, guidance on course design and development.

Key-words

Citizenship, Identity, Children, Higher education, Europe

CiCe (Children's Identity and Citizenship in Europe) is an Erasmus Academic Network linking institutions concerned with citizenship education and the development of identities in young people. It was formed in 1998 and since its inception has been funded with the support of the European Commission, from 2008 through its Lifelong Learning Programme. The network is comprised of nearly 100 partner institutions from 30 European countries, with members involved in teacher education; the education of social pedagogues, youth workers, early childhood workers, sociologists and social psychologists; or related disciplines. Our network brings debates around citizenship and identity to the education of these and other professionals who teach or work with

children and young people as they develop new and multiple identities in a 'Europe of difference'.

Academic theme

Erasmus Academic Networks (previously referred to as Thematic Networks) are designed to promote innovation in a specific discipline, set of disciplines or multidisciplinary area. They promote European co-operation and innovation in specific subject areas and contribute to enhancing quality of teaching in higher education, defining and developing a European dimension within a given academic discipline, furthering innovation and exchanging methodologies and good practices.

The theme of our network is children's identity and citizenship in Europe. As an Erasmus network our focus is on higher education with particular emphasis on pre- and in-service educators concerned with the education of children, defined in broad terms to include all young people from birth to early adulthood, in both formal and informal settings. As such we are concerned with questions such as: What do pre- and in-service professions need to know about the children and young people they work with? What do these children and young people understand about their society? How do they act within it?

How do they construct their identities? How can their participation in society be encouraged? What pedagogic strategies are effective? Where? When?

Citizenship is a contested notion with conceptions ranging from affiliation confined to a nation state to more complex and open conceptions 'based less on a shared sense of identity, and more on membership of complex network of relationships with others (Kratsborn *et al*, 2008). Citizenship and identity meet in a multidimensional complex where subjects and subjectivities are dynamic, multiple and positioned in relation to particular discourses and practices. Given this complexity we do not advocate one form of citizenship or citizenship education, nor a common programme, but rather raise debate around citizenship and identity in context, recognising that the societies in which we live are subject to similar pressures and changes, and that other states have different demands, practices and approaches. In practical terms we are concerned with questions such as: who is included and excluded? What rights, obligations and duties do we have? To what extent should our identity as citizens take precedence over other sources of social identity? What are societal constraints in time and place? And ask: What are possible educational responses to these questions?

Europe provides the geographical context for our work: CiCe is above all a *European* project and our membership and activity gives an explicit European dimensions to

citizenship and identities. Moreover, the areas we address are major priorities of the European Union – social cohesion, tolerance, actively combating racism and xenophobia, the promotion of a European identity, countering the democratic deficit and the promotion of European citizenship. We do not promote one single model of European citizenship rather our concern is with citizenship education and identity formation of children *in* Europe. Europe is seen as a dynamic entity that is far from being sealed off from the wider world, and within this, we are keen to promote active participation in society as a continuing and pressing priority. For a democratic community to work, the membership must participate, not just as spectators of an elite pursuit 'accepting a label, assenting to be part of something' (Ross 2005a), but as active agents in a dynamic society. Equally, we believe that understanding identities as multiple and contingent, embracing the European and other possibilities, contributes to mutual consideration and tolerance. We therefore not only consider what knowledges children need to know, but also what skills and attitudes they need in order to be able to participate in society now and as adults.

How we work

The Network is coordinated by London Metropolitan University, UK, and managed by an Executive Committee drawn from partners in different countries across Europe. Apart from the Network Coordinator, which is an appointed position, the Executive Committee, including President, is democratically elected through our parallel CiCe Association (see <http://www.cicea.eu>).

Our networking activities and the materials that we produce support lecturers in higher education institutions by providing a forum for the sharing of practice, discussion and development; discussion papers on relevant issues; materials for teaching and learning; and, guidance on course design and development. Lecturers are involved in activity in several ways: annual network conferences and regional events provide a platform for them to propose papers, symposia and workshops that demonstrate relevant practice, discuss course content, disseminate research findings and promote research relevant to teaching in Higher Education. Partners actively volunteer to join working groups and the reports and materials that they produce, which offer, for example, guidance on curriculum design, research student supervision and reflections on current practice in different countries, are circulated to all partners and are freely available on our website (<http://cice.londonmet.ac.uk>).

Implicit in the above is the involvement of students in undergraduate and post-graduate study, including pre-service and continuing professional development courses, whose work will, in turn, impact on the children and young people that they work with.

Explicit involvement of students within network activity is focused at post-graduate research level. We hold an annual research student conference where up to twelve doctoral research students have opportunity to present and discuss their work.

We also aim to have impact at policy level. Our materials are shared with policy makers concerned with the direction of citizenship education in partner institutions and other educational policy settings including at government level. Each partner has an Institutional Coordinator who, among other things, is responsible for the dissemination and promotion of CiCe materials within the institution. At a national level we have a National Coordinator for each country represented in the Network, responsible for liaising with partners in that country; for working with NGO's and governmental education authorities; organising national and regional events; the distribution of CiCe materials to national libraries; and, for coordinating with other National Coordinators.

A further strand to our work is with public and community organisations concerned with civic education, social cohesion and the development of respect and tolerance. Where possible we work with such groups and encourage their involvement in HE delivery. In addition to the role of Institutional and National Coordinators as noted above, a Working Group closely liaises with NGOs to establish common ground and guidance on ways of working together. Moreover, we have NGOs as network partners, and many individuals have formal and informal links to such organisations which together with the above helps promote effective dissemination of materials and the sharing of practice. This is further enhanced in local and regional events which specifically seek to involve public and community organisations in contributing and in debate.

We also aim to build and develop positive links with schools and pre-school settings. To this end members are encouraged to involve their existing partners in CiCe networking and events both at local, national and international level through disseminating materials, participating in conference including presenting papers that reflect on educational practice in the area of citizenship and identity formation. More formally we have established a Working Group that aims to build synergies through links between our network and other sectors of lifelong learning with particular focus on Comenius activities.

Cice activities

It is beyond the scope of this paper to outline our activities in detail, but in order to give indication of extent and flavour, information with respect to the following three areas of activity is presented:

- Guidelines on the design of higher education courses

- Building Research Capacity
- Professional guidelines for educators working in the field of citizenship education

Guidelines on the design of higher education courses

We have produced a number of guidance booklets on course development including for teacher education programmes, continuing professional development courses, research degrees, and working in collaboration with NGO's (<http://cice.londonmet.ac.uk/publications>). In this paper we present, by way of example to illustrate our activity, some aspects of our guidance for research degrees that relate to citizenship education and identity. Impetus for this in part came from the Tuning Educational Structures in Europe project, undertaken by the European Commission's Department of Education and Culture (see Gonzales and Wagenaar, 2003). This project addressed several of the Bologna action points: an easily readable and comparable degree structure; a three cycle system; and a transferable system of credits. Significantly, it began the process of identifying generic competences that might be expected to be developed in courses in European higher education. These generic competences were to be complemented by specific competencies *ie* the competencies one might expect to be developed within a particular academic discipline. CiCe took this forward to consider specific competences relating to citizenship education and identity in first cycle (see Rami *et al*, 2006), second cycle (Ross, 2005b) and third cycle (Ross *et al*, 2005c).

With regard to third cycle, research degrees, we identified, through surveying PhD supervisors and students, specific competences that might reasonably be expected to be found in a person with a doctorate in the area of children's understanding of citizenship and the development of identity. These were grouped into four areas of research ability, social sensitivity to the context of research and study in this area, ethical awareness of the uses and consequences of research and study in this area, and the ability to set such study in a broader socio-political context. So for example specific competences associated with research ability and the processes of carrying out research included:

- Ability to design and use sensitive instruments for fieldwork with young people, both (or either) qualitative and quantitative;
- Be a sensitive researcher – in the interpretation of data, in negotiation with informants – with an awareness of the varieties of meaning of identities, citizenship, etc., particularly as they are affected by issues of gender, social class, ethnicity, linguistic, religion, and within the researcher's own society and in other societies in Europe and world;
- Be able to critically reflect on their own history/identity construction; and attempt to control for this in the research process;

- Ability to work sensitively with children and young people.

Guidelines provide further discussion on each of the identified competencies, and in order highlight their importance, include case studies that report on the experiences of research students. As with all our guidelines, these are freely available on our website and it is hoped that they will prove useful for supervisors and students both within and beyond the CiCe network.

Building research capacity

We hold an annual research student conference where up to twelve doctoral research students have opportunity to present and discuss their work. The conference involves direct input from CiCe members experienced in research and doctoral student supervision, on a range of relevant topics from research design to 'getting published', as well as giving personal feedback to students. Masters students are also invited to attend the conference as participant observers. It is hoped that supporting current research students at doctoral level and their supervisors will help ensure a better informed research community, support the development of network at that level, and contribute to the development of ideas of active citizenship, and multiple identities that include a European dimension.

This activity is supplemented by published guidance on research and research supervision from a number of different perspectives. An extract from a booklet exploring *Controversial Issues in Citizenship* (Nausman et al, 2007) is presented below:

'Citizenship education is concerned with an exploration of fundamental values in society. Focusing on controversial issues may motivate students and, as they learn to handle tensions and conflicts, their practical training in citizenship will be enhanced. The issues addressed, however, may be sensitive and even threaten the integrity and identity of individuals and groups during the educational process. Citizenship education focuses on questions that may be controversial and as such cause tensions or conflicts that must be dealt with by social scientists. The existence of controversy is both a consequence of the topic area in itself and of the pedagogical methods that are commonly used. Citizenship education encompasses values and value conflicts and this may pose research problems that a student needs to be prepared for. Research on topics related to citizenship may require consideration of controversial issues'.

This booklet goes on to discuss the connection between research about citizenship and, by examples chosen from different disciplinary contexts and from several countries, the main obstacles and opportunities that controversial issues may produce in research. In so doing it provides different perspectives with the aim of stimulating research

students to reflect on their own work.

Another example of guidance from this series on research practice and supervision, is taken from the guidance booklet, 'Developing practice-based research for critical thinking with philosophy for children'. One section considers the use of questioning with children:

'One of the questions that might be asked on this topic is whether children, especially younger ones, are actually capable of doing philosophy? The question is particularly pressing for professional philosophers: those involved in postgraduate study, teaching or research. For philosophy is not just about asking random questions out of curiosity, - even, as in this case, 'childish curiosity'. To do philosophy is to ask questions - and seek answers - that probe beneath the surface of a cliché like: 'Why is the sky blue?'. Before asking whether children are capable of philosophising or not, we need some kind of working definition. Some argue that philosophy is primarily concerned with foundations. Thus 'Why is the sky blue?' would not be generally thought of as a truly philosophical question, while asking: 'is blue a colour that exists in my head or in the world?' is of a different order. The motivation behind the second question may come from the same aimless curiosity that was behind the first; but this second question is ontological and is a basis for further questions of a philosophical nature.

To ask whether children can philosophise must surely be answered in the affirmative. This is not to say children will be aware that, in asking such questions, they are engaged in a philosophical activity. Philosophy is not the sole property of the ivory tower academic or departmental specialist. Philosophy begins with the mundane or ordinary questions of everyday life. To dismiss a question in citizenship education like 'is President X a good leader?' would be too hasty. The question is not especially philosophical, but questions like: 'What makes a good leader?' are of interest not only to the political historian, but also moral philosophers and, last but not least, teachers of citizenship education. The first question is in itself philosophically inadequate, but it sets the stage for the second' (Etienne et al, 2007).

Professional guidance

We produce a range of guidelines for professionals working in different educational settings, with different age groups and in different cultural contexts. Again to give flavour of our work, presented below is an extract from the introduction to 'Citizenship Education and Identity in courses for those who will work with Pre-school children':

'Citizenship for young children - is there really such a concept? What could citizenship for the young child consist of? Would it be different

from citizenship for an adult? We believe that the child is a citizen from birth, but also that the young child has to grow into the responsibility and rights that are part of being an active member of a democratic society. In one way, being a citizen is different for young children than for adults. The child has to develop and grow into an active citizen, working from experience and trying out different roles, gradually taking on an increasingly active role. One of the aims of every early childhood program should be to teach the child to become an active citizen in a way that does not conform to their surroundings, but is imaginative and exploratory. This emphasis on experience in early childhood institutions reflects certain values that firstly indicate that the child is looked on as an active citizen from the beginning, and secondly show that children are trusted to make decisions concerning their everyday life, which will lead them to being able to make decisions about wider society. Early childhood institutions that exercise a democratic pedagogy give children the sense that everybody is part of society, and that they are valued, included and have a say.

This view of the early childhood institution's role in building up citizenship corresponds with Ocana's (2003) definition: citizenship is not a passive condition (simply enjoying a set of rights and freedoms) but should be active, based on political and civic participation. He points out that historically national citizenship has been constructed through social participation, and that this involvement has often adopted the shape of clashes and conflicts.

Over time, this led to the development of a set of civil, political and social rights and duties, conscience and identity. This can also be said to be the cultural and historical route that early childhood educators follow when educating and talking about citizenship, and how children become active members of their societies. Korsgaard et al. (2001) explains democratic citizenship in a similar way. The first right of a citizen is to establish a law and the first duty of the same citizen is to respect that law. Medve (in Krofli, 2004) states that while education should prepare children for the social reality of life, it can never truly embrace the realistic conditions of life. In the end, therefore, education is always a discourse of a person with values. For the early childhood educator who aims to work for democracy, the journey must therefore begin with a clarification of values: which values are important, and why do we want those values transferred to our children? (Dyrfjord et al, 2004)

The CiCe community

Our network is founded on the premise of sharing knowledge and understanding between partners, and translating these to active implementation in practical programmes that impact on the practice and delivery of courses and educational policies. As can be seen from the extracts presented above, CiCe activity addresses a range of aspects of citizenship education and identity relevant to educators working with children in pre-school settings through to study at doctoral level. We are active in and involve all European countries in the Union and three others. Our processes attempt to ensure that we consider and present a wide range of practices and policies from across Europe. We connect partner institutions and people within them who feel they can achieve more by working together than by working each on their own. This is significant in relation to both geographical coverage and the cross-discipline establishment of the network with focus on a common theme with topics of contemporary concern. Relevance of activity to partners together with a network structure and culture that fosters social belonging and interdependence are seen as central to the success of participation to date.

The conceptual dimension of CiCe with focus on children's identity and citizenship provides coherent focus for participation from different academic disciplines. Cross- and inter-discipline approaches also add value activity and serve to, through conference and seminar meetings, stimulate discourse and contribute to the sharing of innovative ideas and practices. Such collaboration helps promote synergy between teaching and research by encouraging higher education institutions to integrate research results in their teaching. Moreover, our activities help to reinforcing the link between education and society, bringing together public and private sector, scientific and professional players, thereby contributing to Europe's innovation capacity

Networks have both a conceptual and a social dimension and CiCe aims to be inclusive and foster a sense of belonging which we believe in turn stimulates active participation. This is fostered through regular working group meetings, including three face-to-face meetings per year, and an Annual Conference held in a different European country each year.

This paper has only provided a brief overview of the CiCe network. Further information can be found on our website, which includes over 700 articles related to children's identity and citizenship in Europe.

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