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Children’s Citizenship, Education and Europe: moving beyond rights to embrace respect and recognition

Children, Identity, Citizenship and Europe
Istanbul, May 2008

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promoting and researching children and young people’s participation, inclusion and empowerment
Aspinwall, Crowley and Larkins (2003)

European citizenship that is “less ethnocentric, more diverse, more inclusive” (Ross (2003))

Children’s citizenship: a lived practice of rights, responsibility, respect/recognition and membership (Lister 2007)

Children’s actual citizens (Jans 2004)
Introduction

- Research Process and Rights 3 Top Priorities
- Play and Friendship
  - Why children as citizens rather than rights holders
- Discrimination and being listened to
  - How recognition addresses structural/cultural/emotional issues
- Towards an EU Strategy for Children’s Rights
- The EU Charter on Fundamental Human Rights
- The European Parliament Resolution in response to the strategy
Research Process

- **UNCRC**
- **Swansea Youth Forum**
- **Reference Group** designed groups sessions, themed and prioritised data, wrote and presented recommendations to Minister.

- **2 sessions** each with **170 children and young people**
- **Schools**
- **Purposively sampled Roma Gypsy Traveller and BME groups**
Listen Up: Friendship and Play

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.

- Resources
- Membership

The Resolution acknowledges structural barriers to participating in friendship group
Listen Up: Play
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.

... If you get to play then it stops you being naughty

... and then you work better after.

Play enables children to fulfil the responsibilities and thereby enjoy the rights of education
Why Citizenship not rights?

- Access to rights is limited by
  - group membership
  - structural influences (e.g., poverty, racism)
- Enjoying rights contingent on responsibilities
- Children are rights makers and shakers not passive recipients or consumers
- Need a model of children’s citizenship that engages with issues of membership, structure and agency
Listen Up: Bullying and Discrimination

Despite EU protection principles in Treaties

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.
Listen Up: Racism and Ethno-centrism

[The Teacher] says dark coloured people are yellow. He picks on one person because of their colour.

One teacher said if any Muslims take the mick out of you tell them “At least I don’t pray like a bull”.

... She says like a rude comment if you have a black face.

➢ Not new or unique to Wales
➢ Membership of group enjoyment of rights

This is why European Citizenship needs to be “less ethnocentric, more diverse, more inclusive” (Ross 2003)
Can European Citizenship be inclusive?

- EU Strategy and Resolution acknowledge and suggest measures to address racism

- BUT

- European Identity – ethnic and religious difference
- Citizenship – drawing lines of belonging
- EU economic and migration practices serve to legitimate racism.

- Essential to acknowledge and value difference not simply promote white Christian, Western European norms.
Recognition: sameness and difference

Individual Parity of Status
removing cultural barriers to participation
Frazer (2001)

Sameness
Treat people the same and give them another chance and try not to be racist or sexist.

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.

Difference – changing institutionalised patterns of behaviour

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’.

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Listen Up: Being listened to
Being heard and defended, regarding bullying

People call us Gypos, we talk to the teachers and they do nothing about it

As opposed to:

Some teachers say, “If he says that again tell me”. They shout at him. And it stops.

Recognition demonstrated in action
and at an emotional or individual level
Recognition: Understanding and mutual respect

kind-hearted person who always listens to your problems and sorts them out and someone who cares for you and makes you feel safe and real happy.

- “affective acceptance and encouragement”
  (Honneth 2001)

- Building self-esteem

- For qualities that promotes parity for all
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Being listened to and the EU

- **Article 24:** Express views and be taken seriously dependent on age and maturity
- **Institutionalised pattern that impedes parity**

- **Child’s Best Interests of primary importance**

  *James, Curtis and Birch (2008)* - in our risk averse society, adults claims to override children’s decision making form a system of control which is legitimised as protection. In practice however, the limiting of children’s independent decision-making disables children, as it does not allow them access to the experiences that would enable competence in decision making to develop.

*Misrecognition: Deprive of conditions to flourish* (Honneth 2001)
Social Subordination not Parity of Participation

- Article 14
- Child’s right to be educated
  Vs. Parent’s rights to choose the content of this
- Article 32
- Children’s rights to be protected from paid work
  Vs. Subject to compulsory education

Children to have equal status rather than be the subject of adults

*They [teachers] should be friendly, equal to each other and the students*
Conclusion and next steps

- **Recognition** conceived as promoting parity of participation and building self-esteem through respect can help citizenship become a concept that promotes justice and inclusion.

- **Challenge**: for this opportunity to be realized more fully in education and all aspects of children’s lives.

- **Next Task**: getting marginalized children taken seriously in EU developments on children’s rights.
References

Adalbjarnardottir, S. (2004) 'Respect between teachers and students is the basis for all school work' in Social Learning, Inclusiveness and Exclusiveness in Schools: A. Ross & B. Krzywosz-Rynkiewicz, eds..


