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Citizenship Education and Conflict Management"**

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**Workshop 3
"Conflicting identities? The role of identities in conflicts and in
citizenship education"**

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The aim of the workshop was to discuss how citizenship education needs to be designed in diversified societies and how it can deal with the adversarial potential of different identities in order to prevent conflict.

In this opening presentation, I looked at six different aspects or types of identity in order to think about the implications for citizenship education. The background was the well-known phenomenon that identities become hardened in conflicts, especially ethnic and religious identities. Experience from countries such as Bosnia & Herzegovina, Kosovo, Rwanda and Sri Lanka shows how identities can be manipulated: from little or no sense of an 'identity', people take on, or are forced to assume antagonistic, essentialist belongings to some real or imagined community. Work on transitional justice in those countries coming out of conflict reveals the need to confront past histories of conflict and not repeat the identity-based hatreds and rights violations of the past.

The issues for all countries in a plural, mobile world, not just those actually in conflict or transition, hinge round what to do about identities, and when. I rehearse the options.

Identity politics: Here identity is foregrounded as the key defining issue of the moment, leading to, or implying singular, essentialised identities. As in foregrounding gender identity or membership of a minority community, this can be useful as a temporary measure to gain recognition or legal redress. However, it can be dangerous for a long-term way of doing politics, as it can lead to polarization or stereotyping. A related issue is that whether cultural rights should ever supercede other rights, for example in claiming practice associated with a culture to be immune from critique or legal intervention. Similarly, religion can be privileged as an identity over other forms of belonging and representation, and this presents problems for equity.

Hyphenated identities: These include dualisms such as British Muslim, secular Jew, or Euro-Islam. The interesting question here is what is being reconciled. Secular Muslims, for example, recognize the importance of secularism as a form of governance, which treats all religions equally, while retaining their own faith, but other Muslims do not recognize the separation of religion and state. The other question is whether both sides of the hyphen are viewed in the same light. One participant with the dual identity of British Pakistani recounted how in talking to children with similar dualisms, one said 'My father's Indian, my mother's

normal'. In UK, there is always the (semi-) joking 'cricket test': when England plays Pakistan, which side do you support? Are there times when choices have to be made? Which is seen as the most 'normal' – i.e. patriotic?

Superordinate identity: Here the solution to cohesion is held to be the promotion of one national identity, or even a civilizational European Leitkultur. Yet all forms of prescribed unity retain a majoritarian bias (as we find whenever we raise the spectre of 'British values'). What seem like 'cold' national identities can be transformed into 'hot' national identities in times of crisis, of real or perceived threat. Multiculturalism and 'respect for diversity' becomes meaningless when minority groups appear not to accede to majoritarian values, or are deemed unpatriotic. Whose cultures and histories are drawn upon to create a narrative of national identity, distinct from other nations?

Cosmopolitan identity: In contrast to a unitary national identity, a cosmopolitan citizen recognises that life choices and behaviours have an impact beyond the borders of the nation state. This is more than global citizenship, and implies re-imagining the nation itself as cosmopolitan. It is a new superdiversity in the public space, but with shared humanitarian values. There is an emphasis on dialogue, and strategic cosmopolitanism is increasingly digital. The key in integration is to acknowledge that there are borders, but make them less important, for example in the pursuit of some common goal, which is transversal (for example the environment, or fighting disease).

Hybrid, dynamic identities: In this conception, the idea is that not only are we all a mixture of identities, but this mix is continually in flux depending on context and what we, as agents, choose to prioritise at any one moment. We create our own unique fusion which is more than just the collection of labels and markers, and restores individuality and freedom to be creative around identity. This is quite powerful for young people, and enables recognition of how we can resist blanket labels and imposed essentialising. Much humour derives from just such creativity, for example with Muslim female comics defying the stereotypes, or TV shows showing characters misplaced in their social class or gender expectations.

Teacher identities: Finally is the question of professional or work identities. For our concerns in education, how does the identity as a professional teacher mostly paid by the state) intersect with an identity as an activist? Does conflict make teachers more political or less political? In some countries, teachers are not supposed to join trade unions, nor engage in political activity. Elsewhere, it would be an important part of their sense of self to be engaged in a reform movement, and to act as a role model to their students about participation in change.

In looking at the all possibilities above, a key question is whether an identity is 'instructive' but not 'determining' (e.g. religion, gender), and how much opportunity there is for self-definition and agency. An identity can provide dimensions, but does not necessarily determine every single waking moment. There are subjective as well as objective identities. Poverty can be both subjective and objective. But it is the intermix which becomes the really determining factor for individuals and groups. It is also important to acknowledge that one does not have to have an 'identity' at all: for many people, there is no 'core' sense of being which determines how they see themselves. Having a job is not the same as having a work identity. On one level, I could say that I have identities as mother, wife, academic, neighbour, UK citizen etc, but in actuality I do not refer to these labels or their implications in my daily decisions about how to lead my life.

The response of education

I raised some questions for discussion (below) with regard to the role of teachers and schools in tackling issues to do with identity and conflict. I thought I should not deny that I have some view on this, before opening up the floor to those with different contexts and experiences. For me, a rights base to identity solves some problems alluded to above, for example of when it is acceptable to uphold a cultural right and when not; when a religious practice is harmless and when it should be challenged. Work with UNICEF's Rights Respecting Schools shows that when children (and teachers) have solid knowledge of the conventions on rights, including the rights of the child, they are better able to make judgments about what to tolerate and what not to tolerate, regardless of claims about identity and offence.

A national identity could be badged as one that upholds rights such as freedom of speech, or freedom of religion or freedom from violence. An Identity becomes less one as of a member of a 'group' than as a civil actor who knows about rights and is prepared to uphold them. In countries transitioning from conflict, the key may be to build an identity of a new democratic citizen who does not repeat mistakes and harmful values of the past.

But regardless of what our own identity (or non-identity) is, a task for the school might be about protection and tackling bigotry around identity. An extract from the book *Facing History and Ourselves* is a story from Patel, an American Muslim, about a Jewish friend who was subject to anti-Semitism:

'I knew little of what Judaism meant to him, less about the emotional effects of anti-Semitism, and next to nothing about how to stop any religious bigotry. So I averted my eyes and avoided my friend because I couldn't stand to face him.
A few years later he described to me the fear he had experienced coming to school those days, and his utter loneliness as he had watched his close friends simply stand by. Hearing him recount his suffering and my complicity is the single most humiliating experience of my life. I did not know it in high school, but my silence was betrayal of Islam, which calls upon Muslims to be courageous and compassionate in the face of injustice; betrayal of America, a nation that relies on its citizens to hold up the bridges of pluralism when others try to destroy them, betrayal of India, a country that too often seen blood flow in its cities and villages when extremists target minorities and others fail to protect them.
My friend needed more than my silent presence at the lunch table. Pluralism is not a default position, an autopilot mode. Pluralism is an intentional commitment that is imprinted through action. It requires deliberate engagement with difference, outspoken loyalty to others and proactive protection in the breach. You have to step off the faith line onto the side of pluralism, and then you have to make your voice heard. To follow Robert Frost, it is easy to see the death of pluralism in the fire of a suicide bombing, but the ice of silence will kill it just as well.'

Questions for discussion:

1. How should schools and citizenship education tackle the presence of plural identities in the classroom? How much 'diversity' is to be respected? When should identity be foregrounded in discussion?
2. How can a nation have a superordinate citizenship identity, which is not assimilationist for minority groups?
3. In history and social science, how can teachers confront a recent conflictual past without stirring up old animosities and/or questioning the legitimacy of the state?