Neoliberalism and Citizenship in the Bangladesh Secondary School Curriculum

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Abstract

In the 21st century, notions of citizenship are highly contested in relation to issues such as place, identity, and process. In the present context of globalisation, it is a challenging and difficult task in developing curriculum to decide what the most worthwhile knowledge for citizenship is. This article explores tension between two contested views of citizenship; one is derived from notions of globalism and the other from those of localism. At the level of the Bangladesh intended secondary curriculum the tension is evident in the guise of discourses about economic development and growth and the transfer of knowledge. I argue that at the intended level the Bangladesh secondary school curriculum can best be understood as a contested political text (Pinar, 1996), and one that largely reflects a western neoliberal understanding of citizenship. While the initiative to include contemporary citizenship discourses in policy development is desirable, consideration needs to be given to the potential that the capitalist citizenship ideology has, under the disguise of economic development, to commercialise our society and the relationships between the individual and the community.

Introduction

What makes for good citizenship? And can curriculum address its development? In the 21st century, notions of citizenship are highly contested in relation to issues such as place, identity, and process. According to Ichilov (1998), in the postmodern era the dominant patterns of citizenship are characterised by compelling ideologies which include individualism and changing perspectives. The driving forces behind these ideologies are economic development and national power. Within this reality a good citizen is one who understands

“[Multiple] identity most lucidly and who strives most ardently in his public life to achieve the closest concordance possible between the policies and goals of the several civic levels of which he is a member (Heater, 1990; cited in Ichilov, 1998, p. 22).”

In such changing conditions those writing curricula need to make decisions about what is worthwhile knowledge for students to learn about citizenship, and at the same time outline the learning intentions and processes that can best meet these ends (McGee, 1997). In this case curriculum is not a neutral document as “what is to be learned is permeated with objectives and intentions” (Ross, 2002, p. 45).

This article explores the tension between two contested views of citizenship; one is derived from notions of globalism and the other from those of localism. At the level of the Bangladesh intended secondary school curriculum the tension is evident in the guise of discourses about economic development/growth and transfer of knowledge. First I present a brief introduction to the theoretical framework of intended curriculum and of notions of citizenship in a global context. Then I present the discourses about citizenship that were obtained through analysis of
curriculum documents, individual interviews, and focus group discussions. Next I discuss the implications for society in Bangladesh of dominant ideologies of citizenship that are identified in my analysis.

To investigate the competing notions of citizenship and their implications I draw on material from a range of curriculum documents and stakeholder perspectives. I use evidence from the curriculum documents of three subjects (English Language, Social Science, and Business Studies), the basic principles addressed in the 1995 curriculum review, the general aims and objectives of the published curriculum (NCTB, 1996). I examine the stated understandings, beliefs and values of teachers and students. These were accessed through individual interviews and focus group discussions from participants in one school. I also draw on my experience as a teacher within Bangladesh and acknowledge myself as an engaged participant in the issues I address. A full discussion of my methodological approach and of the findings can be found in Alam (2011).

Globalisation and Citizenship

I suggest that in Bangladesh contested views of citizenship are played out at the level of the intended curriculum, in curriculum documents, and in people’s perceptions, and that this occurs across the whole of schooling, both explicitly and implicitly. The intended curriculum is what is planned at the national level by the government and it provides the base of the school curriculum (McGee, 1997).

Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery, and Taubman (1996), suggest that we need to make a shift from conceptualising the curriculum in terms of development and implementation to thinking about it more critically by examining what sort of ways of knowing it advocates and what the implications of those ways of knowing are. In Bangladesh this kind of shift could be brought about by raising questions about how the curriculum is framed and used. Is the curriculum a prescribed syllabus or is it a way of thinking about education? How is the curriculum traded by the donor agencies as an international commodity within a context operating in ways to legitimise Western ways of knowing and to serve Western economic interests? The whole issue is political in nature and concerned with ideas about the global knowledge economy and neoliberal globalisation. A traded curriculum has troubling implications. As a teacher, I would suggest that, as far as creating critical future citizens for Bangladesh is concerned, it is necessary to consider how the issues of diversity and multiculturalism are addressed in the intended secondary curriculum.

In the present context of globalisation, it is a challenging and difficult task in parts of the Bangladesh secondary intended curriculum to decide what the most worthwhile knowledge for citizenship is. Due to economic and political globalisation, the social, political, economic and ideological meanings of citizenship have been transformed (Ichilov, 1998). Democratic citizenship values have been replaced by postmodern capitalist values of citizenship which work against social justice (ibid). We need to think about the new meanings of citizenship and provide Bangladeshi students with the necessary knowledge, skills, and attitudes that enable them to assume their role as citizens. Democracy can only become visible or viable in Bangladesh if its citizens understand and practise it. This can be done by taking informed decisions in the curriculum about what is the most worthwhile knowledge of citizenship to gain, and considering the principles of inclusion and justice. This requires a clear understanding of the present local and global context, of the cultural diversity and specific objectives and strategies. Notions of citizenship that are considered most worth learning by Bangladeshi students are, therefore, a concern worthy of investigation.
I use an analysis of the curriculum documents and stakeholder perspectives to explore the tensions between neoliberal discourses of citizenship and critical approaches to citizenship and their resulting implications. Drawing on the works of Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery, and Taubman (1996); Alexander (2005); Apple (1996); Bredo (2006); Gee (1990); MacLure (2003); Odora-Hoppers (2010); Popkewitz (1997); Ichilov (1998); Peters, Britton, and Blee (2008); Tully (2008); Dobson (2005 & 2006); Peters (2004); Andreotti (2005 & 2006); Biesta (2010); and Rizvi (2011), I argue that at the intended level the Bangladesh secondary curriculum can best be understood as a contested political text (Pinar et al, 1996), and largely reflecting a western neoliberal understanding of citizenship. Therefore, while the Bangladesh initiative to include the contemporary citizenship discourses in policy development is positive, consideration needs to be given to the threat posed by capitalist citizenship ideology to commercialise our society and the relationships between the individual and the community, under the guise of economic development. This is, in fact, a threat to democracy and autonomous economic development.

**Economic Development and Growth**

The conception of citizenship associated with the discourse of Economic Development/Growth emphasises achieving global economic competitiveness and insists that individuals should accept responsibility for their own employability. The significance of this discourse is that it has a dual emphasis in understanding citizenship. First, there is an aim to prepare young Bangladeshi students to be competitive in the global marketplace. Second, it indicates that dispositions need to be cultivated toward values of nationalism. So, citizenship is understood here across the binary of global economic forces and local nation-centric assumptions. It is now important to explore how the curriculum documents and the views of stakeholders reinforce this tension between global and local values in terms of citizenship. I will show how there are conflicting understandings of citizenship within the curriculum document and within stated beliefs of teachers.

There were major micro and macro curricular concerns about the previous secondary curriculum of Bangladesh, on the basis of which it was revised in 1995. An understanding of these is needed in order to explore the politics and intentions of the reform initiatives in relation to citizenship.

**Responsiveness to an Open Market Economy**

In 1995 the secondary curriculum in Bangladesh underwent a profound change, influenced by the idea of the free market economy. Failure to generate employment was identified as a macro curricular concern and the content of different subjects was found inadequate for the needs of the global market. In this reform the primacy of practical knowledge over theoretical knowledge became the dominant belief. However, the main thrusts in curriculum reform in 1995 were directed at both micro and macro curricular problems. To resolve the micro curricular issues, the main focus was on restructuring the syllabi of different subjects to make education responsive to the open economy. The following quote, drawn from the curriculum and secondary syllabus documents by the National Curriculum and Text Book Board (NCTB), 1996, demonstrates how government policies responded to the discourse of an 'open market economy' by privileging the notion of competition:

> There is now an open market economy in our country. The basic principle of this economy is that to survive in the race we need qualifications/skills and this competition is spreading within and across borders. So we need to redesign our curriculum so it is
equivalent to international standards so that students can obtain the necessary competitive skills. (NCTB, 1996, p. 5)

In the basic principles of the curriculum review it is also stated that it is important for Bangladesh to maintain its unique cultural and religious identities and social values:

Through a revised curriculum students will be enabled to acquire new knowledge and skills and at the same time it is also stated that students will be inspired by our own religious, moral, cultural and social values. (NCTB, 1996, p. 5)

On the one hand 'new knowledge and skills' are related to an open market economy, but on the other hand, the government also wants the country to value its own cultural identity. Arguably, these intentions sit uncomfortably together.

In the aims and objectives of Education the need to cultivate competitive human resources for socio-economic development is stated:

Education needs to be pragmatic so that we can produce skilled, innovative, and productive human resources for the socio-economic advancement of the country. (NCTB, 1996, p.11)

Communicative competence in using English is identified in the English language curriculum as an important work-oriented skill for economic development (NCTB, 1996):

English needs to be recognised as an essential work-oriented skill that is needed if the employment, developmental and educational needs of the country are to be met successfully. Increased communicational competence in English, therefore, constitutes a vital skill for learners at this stage, whether they leave school to take up a vocation or continue their studies up to Higher Secondary level. English should, therefore, be taught as something to be used, rather than as something to be talked about. (NCTB, 1996, p. 136)

The above quotations all reveal a tension within policy perspectives. The Government wants to equip citizens to be nationally and internationally competitive from the neoliberal perspective. Yet at the same time there is a conscious effort to give importance to maintaining our own religious, moral, cultural and social values. So there is a tension in the government’s goals between these different ways of understanding what it means to be a citizen. On the one hand there is the neoliberal understanding, and on the other hand, there is the critical approach to citizenship (Andreotti, 2006) which values knowing one’s own cultural identity. These two ideas of citizenship might at first appear to be mutually exclusive and at the least do not sit together comfortably. Another interesting point is that there was a very mechanistic aspiration in learning communicative English skills in order to get a job rather than taking it as a medium which helps students to become capable of negotiating their place in the world.

Developing Entrepreneurship Skills to Generate Self-employment

In 1995 there was an explicit intention to see the secondary curriculum as a vehicle to generate self-employment for economic prosperity. It was claimed that theoretical and bookish knowledge was not helping students to become self-employed. New attitudes and skills for self-employment
needed to be developed in students through business education and through training in technical and vocational education. So, failing to generate self-employment was recognised as a macro curricular problem in Bangladesh. To address this issue Business Studies was included in secondary education to develop in students the initiative necessary to set them up in self employment. In the curriculum reform of 1995 the centrality of practical knowledge for producing entrepreneurs to generate self employment was considered obvious. This can be seen in the background information of the curriculum reform report (NCTB, 1996):

The present Curriculum is failing to fulfil the learning needs of the students and as a consequence the numbers of educated unemployed people are increasing day by day. This situation is created because the information and theory based curriculum and bookish knowledge is failing to generate self-employment. For generating self-employment we need to transmit trainability, the necessary skills and attitudes to the students. The present curriculum and education system is not conveying these qualities to the learners. (NCTB, 1996, p.5)

The importance of vocational education for self-employment is stated in the characteristics of the curriculum document:

Through the revised curriculum students will be enabled to engage themselves in self-employment by acquiring the necessary skills in vocational education. (NCTB, 1996, p.7)

Producing entrepreneurs to develop the economy is seen as the main task of the Business Studies curriculum:

It is necessary to be a good entrepreneur to advance in business. Business Studies provides a mechanism for creating entrepreneurs...Therefore, considering the importance of Business Studies in the context of our current social conditions, it has been identified as an important and distinctive subject like Science and Arts in the secondary level. Business is the practical work of an economy. This work can't be accomplished only through some theoretical knowledge. But theoretical knowledge makes practical business work easy and sure. (NCTB, 1996, p. 495)

From the above quotations it is clear that the government included Business Studies as a discipline at secondary level in order to give students the necessary attitudes and skills so that they can become entrepreneurs and will believe that being self-employed is a viable way to earn a living. The focus of this policy initiative is on values of citizenship such as individualism, prosperity, and freedom in a neoliberal context that promotes private and personal goals.

So, from the above quotations it is clear that there is a dual understanding of citizenship in the curriculum. One aim is to prepare globally competitive citizens for the international market and the other is to set them back into their own history and identity. This is not surprising. However, these contradictory and competing understandings about citizenship seem to set goals that are at opposite ends of a spectrum. They actually reframe the idea of the citizen of a local community as being also the citizen of an imaginary global community, having, as Tully (2008) suggests, an abstract imagination of personal sovereignty and prosperity. This tension is evident even more profoundly in the Social Science curriculum which I will discuss later. From the context of critical curriculum studies it is clear that the Bangladesh secondary curriculum
document (NCTB, 1996) is a political text. Its political intention is shown by its assumption that knowledge of citizenship for economic competitiveness is considered worth knowing.

In relation to the policy perspectives I now want to explore the competing understandings of citizenship that are mentioned by teachers. I tried to unpack the beliefs of participants about citizenship by asking them three different questions: What do you think are the aims of education? What do you think citizenship is? What type of citizen/individual do you want to see cultivated for Bangladesh and why? In replying to these questions teachers came out with many different and perhaps conflicting ideas, similar to the policy perspectives.

In some cases teachers also believe that we need to take advantage of the opportunities that come from globalisation as well as needing to be conscious of our identity and culture. Sikder, a teacher, conceptualises citizenship in relation to globalisation as well as to his own cultural heritage and identity as follows:

As a teacher I want to see that all the students of Bangladesh can become global citizens through their secondary education. Because of globalisation we are living in the global village. So we cannot isolate ourselves. The distance has been decreased, this is why we must go for the achievement that will make us competitive, and that will make us worthy. Because of the global village, we must change, modify or just make our curriculum as global as possible. (Sikder, interview, 19.01.2011)

You can see the encroachment or intrusion of so many things because of globalisation. But we have our own intellect, concerns and considered judgements about whether to accept these things. The things which are not good for our own culture, our cultural heritage, our tradition, and of course our environment, our existence, we must not accept those. We should just keep aloof or just reject those things, but we need to accept the new ideas or the new things which are helpful for us and which respect our own cultural identity, existence and nationalism. (Sikder, interview, 19.01.2011)

It is clear that Sikder holds conflicting understandings of citizenship. He would like to prepare our students for the competitive global market and at the same time does not want to be dominated by foreign values, ethics, morals and behaviours. He wants what is important to us and wants us to be able to define ourselves in our own terms. He also wants to see that students become aware of environmental issues. He wants citizens capable of participating in economic activities on a global scale as well as citizens who will remain true to Bangladeshi culture and identity. I think this encapsulates well the tension within neoliberal globalisation.

Several other participants are also concerned about the implications of globalisation for our environment and want to produce citizens who care about our society and the environment. Sajjad, a teacher, and Reza, a principal, explain their conception of citizenship as creating awareness of the environment, awareness of wider society and awareness of the state and of the earth. The following quotes show their beliefs about citizenship:

If you look at our society you will see that due to unplanned industrialisation we are polluting the air, water and everything. So, we need coordination between education and what is happening in practice for producing a citizen who will be caring to the environment and other creatures. (Sajjad, interview, 19.01.2011)
Through the Bangladesh secondary education I dream of producing patriotic citizens who will not only think about themselves, but also think about others, about the country, about the Earth and who will be responsible and act as a conscience of society. (Reza, interview, 22.01.2011)

Reza and Sajjad have here conceptualised citizenship as responsible human behaviour and consciousness about nature. This mirrors a perspective of citizenship which Peters (2004) called 'earthism'. 'Earthism' refers to the idea of the interdependence of all of life. Reza and Sajjad conceptualise a citizen as someone who will care and think about the impact of globalisation on the environment. So, their understanding of citizenship differs with Sikder's understanding of global citizenship. These different understandings of how they think Bangladesh fits in the global order may well sit quite uncomfortably together.

Transfer of Knowledge

The role of a transfer of knowledge within a conception of citizenship is to provide the young Bangladeshi students with the necessary knowledge, skills and dispositions which are considered as essential for citizenship. Within this study it emerges that the rationale for a transfer of knowledge and skills is based on two concepts of citizenship: one is national feelings and another is economic development. The question might be what kind of 'socialization' and 'subjectification' (Biesta, 2010) could be activated through these two views of citizenship. I will discuss this dilemma more fully in what follows. Realising personal goals is seen as the motivation for gaining the necessary knowledge and skills. The other important aspect of citizenship is related to duties and responsibilities.

Here I will draw on material in the Social Science curriculum and on the stated views of teachers and students about citizenship.

Providing knowledge and skills about rights and duties and the workings of the social, political, and economic system are prioritised in the rationale for citizenship education in the Social Science curriculum (NCTB, 1996), as can be seen in the following statement of aims and objectives:

To encourage some knowledge of the present social system of Bangladesh. To play a supporting role in creating a new society based on the ideas acquired about the different problems of society. To regenerate national feeling, heritage, ideals, and patriotism. To know about the relationship between man and environment. To know about the culture and the heritage. To know about the rights and duties of a citizen. To have a general idea about constitutional processes and National and International Polities. To gain sufficient knowledge for the economic development of personal and state life. To be inspired to have useful knowledge and skills in order to increase the standard of living through self employment. To get first ideas about the techniques of economic development of the country. To have some idea about the population problem of Bangladesh. (NCTB, 1995, p.292)

From these aims and objectives we get a clear view of one conception of citizenship in Bangladesh. Here the task of educating for citizenship is defined in terms of providing students with knowledge and skills about rights and duties and the workings of the social, political and economic system. Such knowledge and skills are considered important for constructing the
students’ citizenship identity. The statement also put emphasis on giving students attitudes and skills suitable for generating self-employment. If we look critically at the aims and objectives of the Social Science curriculum there is no discussion of good citizenship in either cultural or moral terms. From the perspective of critical curriculum studies the knowledge of a particular set of political values for citizenship identity is considered worth knowing (Pinar et al, 1996).

From Sikder, a teacher, and from focus group discussions with teachers, we get conceptions of citizenship which see as important the relationship of individuals to rights and obligations. The following quotes provide characteristics of this citizenship discourse:

Citizenship education in Bangladesh is based on the core values of patriotism, duty to society, freedom of choice, skilfulness and honesty and doing no harm to others. (A teacher focus group discussion, 20.01 2011)

To me citizenship means the duties, responsibilities, and rights of a citizen. Rights mean the basic human rights such as education, food, clothing, and treatment. Responsibilities means he needs to vote and pay taxes. He needs to help the law enforcing agencies to prevent conflict and violence. He can participate in the government programmes which are helpful for society. I mean for instance, it may be the eradication of illiteracy, it may be poverty alleviation. He can motivate the people. (Sikder, interview, 19.01.2011)

Ripon and Hannan, two other teachers, also describe citizenship as involving the relationship between the state and the individual based on moral responsibility, a volunteering civic consciousness and notions of collective well being. In this they align with concepts discussed by Ichilov, (1998) and Peters et al, (2008). The following quotes demonstrate these ideas of citizenship:

The first thing I think about citizenship is to love your country and fellow countryman. A citizen must be aware of his duties and responsibilities. The most important thing of citizenship is to think about the implications of any decision or activity and the ability to make decisions according to the situation. Moreover, a good citizen will never participate in any activity that goes against the welfare of the state. (Ripon, interview, 16.01.2011)

Citizenship means self control, to work with your own intellect, and to carry out the duties and responsibilities of the country. A good citizen will never use his privileged position to exercise power. (Hannan, interview, 16.01.2011)

The participants' views of citizenship pertaining to the relationship between state and the individual are based on ideas of reciprocal social contracts and the importance of rights, duties and responsibilities. Ripon defined a good citizen as a person who will not involve himself in anti-state activities. Hannan defines a good citizen as a person who will not use their privileged position to exercise power. So these teachers' ideas about citizenship reflect an emphasis in educating for citizenship to inculcate values such as those that lead to performing charitable activities like poverty alleviation, doing work for the wellbeing of society, helping the unfortunate, and being patriotic.

It is interesting to align these views with those expressed by students in a focus group discussion. The students’ stated idea of citizenship is complex as they want to learn the necessary skills for gaining a livelihood, as well as wanting to be a citizen who is patriotic, self-
reliant, intellectually free, and who cares about society. This can be seen in the following statement which is typical of the views expressed:

Through secondary and vocational education we want to do well in exams to acquire the necessary qualifications for gaining a livelihood. At the same time it is most important to obtain citizenship qualities such as: patriotism, self-dependency, intellectual sovereignty, respect for others and caring for the environment. (A student focus group discussion, 19.01.2011)

The focus group discussion reveals that students consider preparation for citizenship to be about acquiring the knowledge for gaining a livelihood as well as it being important for them to become a citizen who is an autonomous thinker. During the focus group discussion they debated what intellectual sovereignty actually means to them. They said intellectual sovereignty enables a student to think logically. They also said if a person thinks logically he cannot confine himself to a particular view that may make him impoverished. They suggested that an intellectual person analyses any assumption logically in relation to religion, politics, the economy, socialism, morality, and law which leads them to respect other ways of thinking. From this it seems that the students were more willing to explore and critically examine their social context than their teachers.

**Economic Development, Capitalist Hegemony and Social Justice**

The underlying tension identified from the analysis of the intended secondary curriculum and the stated beliefs of the teachers is between two potentially competing concepts of citizenship; what Ichilov (1998) calls globalism and localism. Under the guise of an economic development discourse, citizenship is understood as the development of global economic competitiveness, and the development of the necessary entrepreneurial attitudes and skills for self-employment. These understandings project the vision of neoliberal “individualism and universalism” (Peters et al., 2008) which tends to maximise private interest at the expense of equity and justice. The problem with the idea of universalism can be traced through Bhabha (1990, p. 208) as he argues "the universalism that paradoxically permits diversity masks ethnocentric norms" (cited in Rizvi, 2011, p. 183). It also “ignores the workings of power and privilege” (Rizvi, 2011). At the same time, there is a rhetorical understanding of citizenship as valuing Bangladeshi culture and identity under an economic development discourse.

The hegemony of capitalist values functions as a dominant citizenship ideology in the intended curriculum as well as in the teachers’ views. This can work against the liberating principles of greater equality and social justice. What is problematic about an emphasis on achieving global economic competitiveness is that a capitalist citizenship ideology may not enable students to reflect and develop the tools to negotiate the prevailing differences in Bangladeshi society and cause them to uncritically submit to a hegemonic system. Such an ideology of citizenship is strongly associated with an understanding of cosmopolitanism where human rights and human reasoning are defined within the perspectives of capitalism, colonialism, and transnational trade. Within the dominance of capitalism and colonialism, the assumptions around citizenship and human reasoning bind us to the concept of “a single moral community” (Peters et al., 2008). The basic characteristics of this single moral community are; freedom, equality, and autonomy based on the concept of a universal law. In the name of freedom, equality, and personal autonomy this universal law, as Tully (2008) explains, creates the grounds which make it permissible for the citizens of imperial powers to participate in business outside their homeland and also protects them from any interference.
The emphasis on developing entrepreneurial attitudes and skills, and inculcating a sense of responsibility to achieve self-employment, indicates that the intended secondary curriculum was framed to construct corporate citizenship ideals in the minds of our students so that they learn to appreciate the free exercise of "civil liberties (private autonomy)" (Tully, 2008). This form of citizenship also creates an egocentric aspiration for personal gain in the minds of young students. Through these cosmopolitan forms of citizenship, students may be led to think of themselves as equal citizens of a global community without understanding the implicit colonial intentions at the heart of dominant notions of cosmopolitanism. As Tully (2008) notes:

The people were socialised by education, urbanisation, military duty, industrialisation, and modern citizenship to see themselves first and foremost, not as citizens of their local communities, but as members of an abstract and 'disembedded' imaginary community of nation, demos and nomos of formally free and equal yet materially unequal citizens, with an equally abstract imaginary of popular sovereignty they mythically embodied and exercised through the individual liberties of modern citizenship attached to the central legal and representative institutions. (p.20)

The issue of cosmopolitan citizenship was neither critically examined by the curriculum policy makers nor by the respondent teachers. However, it develops a basis of obligation for individuals' actions. The development of a notion of a citizen of an imaginary global community runs the risk of creating a mythical and false belief in a common humanity rather than a sense of a political obligation to bring about greater justice for the oppressed. The source of the assumption of common humanity is the Western notion of progress where unequal power relations fall outside the realm of any intellectual action that is guided by common humanity (Dobson, 2006).

If we consider education as a medium for change, the notions of corporate and cosmopolitan citizenship articulated in the intended Bangladesh secondary curriculum under the camouflage of economic development are an attempt to impose change. The basic principle of this change is universalism. It ignores a concern with the politics of differences and diversities and avoids an examination of what ethical relations might be involved in a context of diversity. Such a discourse of universalism helps us to forget epistemic violence of colonialism that Andreotti (2006) explains as the production of unequal power relations, and the maintenance of dependency. So what kind of agency can be created by this imported notion of change that seems to be fostered through such ideas of citizenship?

Within the belief system of cosmopolitan citizenship the type of subjectivity that can be created is based on the assumption of self-motivated competition to gain power to consume. The notion of agency articulated in the intended curriculum, therefore, is shaped by the discourse of capitalism where individuals' actions are targeted to adapt to the prevailing hegemonic system, maintaining the status quo and conformity to individualism (Andreotti, 2005). The implicit intention of this agency can magnify political apathy leading students to become subservient to a capitalist vision of citizenship.

On the other hand, in the curriculum and in the stated beliefs of teachers, citizenship is also seen as needing to respect Bangladeshi religious, moral, cultural, and social values and Bangladeshi identity. It is thus conceptualised as being important for maintaining social order according to Bangladeshi tradition. In this view, citizenship is seen as important for maintaining cultural distinctiveness and is expressed in opposition to the encroaching forces of globalisation. So how can the tensions between emphasising competition and material gain and maintaining a
cultural heritage be reconciled? When we give importance to valuing cultural heritage against global encroaching forces, we need to consider the risk of cultural differences being exploited. The big challenge of the continuing exploitation of cultural differences remains unnoticed in this view of local citizenship.

Also, in understanding citizenship, few of the teachers expressed any concern about the environmental degradation caused by globalisation. A view of citizenship related to environmental sustainability is in opposition to neoliberal individualism. Earthism (Peters 2004), acknowledges the interdependence of life where the impact caused by environmental disasters is acknowledged and respect for the world around us is considered. The earthist notion of citizenship sees poverty as an issue for justice rather than an issue for charity or benevolence. From this view of citizenship young Bangladeshi students could challenge “the hierarchical structures that maintain order for some at the expense of others” (Peters, 2004, p. 112). But whereas students talked about responsible human behaviour and consciousness about the environment the teachers tended to gloss such views as ‘common sense’.

What are the implications of neoliberal understandings of citizenship dominating our social, educational, political and economic life? Particularly, what is the implication of pursuing personal gain at the expense of equity and justice? First, I suggest that this is a ruling class strategy for maintaining class divisions by which a local elite class is created with no sense of a greater social good. It runs the risk of commercialising our society and the relationship between the individual and the community. The principles of democratic government could come under threat and the government may fail to balance the interests of economic utility and social justice for its citizens. This can create social unrest which runs the risk of undermining democracy and economic development. The dominant neoliberal citizenship ideologies can result in alienated and apathetic citizens, and limit opportunities for solidarity amongst citizens. The dangers and possible consequences of neoliberal notions of citizenship are stated by Freire (1998):

> It’s a question of jumping on the train in the middle of the journey without discussing the conditions, the cultures, or the forms of production of the countries that are being swept along. And there is no talk about the distance that separates the “rights” of the strong and their power to enjoy them from the fragility of the weak in their attempts to exercise their rights. Meanwhile, responsibilities and duties are leveled-equal for all. If globalisation means the abolition of the frontiers and the opening without restriction to free enterprise, those who cannot compete simply disappear. (p. 114)

Knowledge of Citizenship and Criticality

At the intended level of the Social Science curriculum, and from the teachers' perceptions, the dimensions of citizenship that are considered indispensable for Bangladeshi students are confined to providing them with knowledge, skills, a sense of duty and responsibility and knowing how the social, political and economic system works. Mainly, the emphasis is on two concepts of citizenship: regenerating students' sense of heritage, ideals, and patriotism as well as giving them the necessary attitudes and skills that equip them to take their place in the economy either as self-employed businessmen or as employees of others. The tension between different citizenship dimensions can be examined through the “qualification, socialisation and subjectification” (Biesta, 2010, p.24) functions of education.

First, this articulation of citizenship clearly indicates that the intention, in terms of ‘qualification’, is to teach students to accept the importance of Bangladeshi national identity as well as
adopting neoliberal citizenship values (one’s responsibility of self-employability). The importance of enabling students to reflect critically on the economic and political processes and practices that widen the gap between the West and non-West and the rich and poor within our own society is ignored. The agenda of citizenship is, therefore, strongly focused on socialisation into neoliberal identities and subjectivities that shut down possibilities for political subjectivity and agency.

Another implicit but distinctive feature of citizenship that needs discussion is what is actually meant by a good Bangladeshi citizen in the intended Social Science curriculum. If creating political agency is the central concern of a citizenship dimension, the Social Science curriculum shapes agency in a way that motivates students to compete to gain power. A good citizen is he who will insert himself into the prevailing economic and political order without any hesitation. Competition is not always a negative thing but if its discursive scope fails to liberate the students, it is problematic. No such attempt is evident, other than some ornamental importance attached to respecting Bangladeshi culture and heritage. An implicit but profound integration of neoliberal citizenship is thus evident in the intended Social Science curriculum.

Teachers’ ideas about citizenship also reflect a desire to confine the task of educating for citizenship to inculcating values such as performing charitable activities like joining in the poverty alleviation campaigns, doing work for the wellbeing of society, helping the unfortunate, and patriotism. This expression of citizenship is designed to socialise the students into accepted moral values. However, the intention of the socialisation function of citizenship needs to be the development of critical consciousness so that students can take poverty and the conditions of the less fortunate as an incentive for political action as well as moral obligation. If socialisation leads to a concern with only the surface of the problem of poverty, this may only help to sustain "deep-seated political, economic, racial, and gender inequalities" (Feinberg, 1975; cited in Giroux, 2001, p. 73).

On the other hand, the students consider citizenship to be about acquiring the knowledge for gaining a livelihood as well as it being important for them to become a citizen who is an autonomous thinker. The students’ articulation of citizenship in terms of qualification has the clear cut intention of needing to acquire the necessary knowledge for employment. This articulation rests merely on the concept of training for a particular job which is connected to the rationale of economic development and growth. Apart from this, the students also discuss their desire to become intellectual and democratic citizens who are able to reflect rationally on the assumptions related to religion, economy and politics. However, this agenda of political subjectification has remained silent in the Bangladesh secondary curriculum document. It is neoliberal ideology that appears dominant throughout the curriculum and aims to shape the consciousness and aspirations of students so that they think of themselves as citizens of a single moral community. MacLure (2003) suggests that this humanist view of citizenship legitimises the continuation of the informal colonial legacy.

From a post colonial perspective, the language of the curriculum texts suggests that the interests of the poor, minority religious groups, and indigenous peoples are silenced. The language constitutes the realities of the dominant Bangladeshi middle class and upper middle class and these realities are made indispensable for all people of Bangladesh. This is an intrinsic policy intervention to maintain class differences and the status quo. The secondary curriculum can therefore be seen as a powerful tool of social engineering (Popkewitz, 1997). It inscribes rules that fail to acknowledge the politics of power and knowledge that are widely embodied in our society and that help to maintain external and internal domination in terms of
politics, economy, religion and culture. This is an epistemological problem at the level of policy as it fails to give equal status to diverse perspectives.

The embedded politics of knowledge impacts on students' understandings. Colonial discourses of entrepreneurship, competitiveness, and self-employment appear to set the requirements of citizenship in the secondary curriculum, rather than discourses of collective self-determination. In the context of transnationalism and globalisation these discourses continue to make citizenship a fragile and highly contingent enterprise. The integrated language of the curriculum relative to our social practices constitutes discourses of citizenship as personal gain, individualism and nationalism. Through such discourses Western ways of knowing and being are assumed to be the best and continue to affect our own ways of knowing and being. We need to rethink how knowledge of citizenship is created and whose knowledge counts as legitimate. To bring change, we have to critically question and reframe the contributing discourses that are being used to colonise us.

Conclusion

At the intended level of the Bangladesh secondary curriculum, importance has been given to cultivating dispositions which respect Bangladeshi culture, identity and religious belief. At the same time, within the dominant ideology of a free market economy, the explicit intention has been to direct students' subjectivity towards a neoliberal consumer identity in response to the market's call for individualistic notions of entrepreneurial savviness in order to generate responsibility for self-employability. This focus does not consider the workings of power and privilege, and therefore ignores the interests of the poor, minority religious groups and indigenous peoples. Moreover, issues of diversity are addressed within a relatively fragile understanding of multiculturalism across the binary of global and nation-centric assumptions. Despite brief and unspecific acknowledgement of multiculturalism in the curriculum, the main suggestion is that the purpose of education is to provide students with new knowledge and skills so that they can contribute to the socio-economic prosperity of Bangladesh. Such a strategy maintains existing inter-group relations (middle class and the elite class), while not providing ethnic groups and the poor with any resources or opportunities to define their own ways of knowing and being.

I think there is a scope to review the Bangladesh secondary school curriculum in terms of critical multicultural approaches. Inclusion of such approaches at policy level can help to prepare future Bangladeshi citizens to be more socially responsible. They may then be able to respect their own cultural beliefs and practices as well as those of others.

References


