

ARTICLE

Intercultural citizenship from an internationalist perspective

Michael BYRAM¹

¹ Professor Emeritus
School of Education, University of Durham, UK

Address for Correspondence: Prof Michael Byram, School of Education, University of Durham, Durham DH1 1TA England. Email: M.S.Byram@dur.ac.uk

Recommended citation:

Byram, M. (2011). Intercultural citizenship from an internationalist perspective. *Journal of the NUS Teaching Academy*, 1 (1), 10-20.

<https://doi.org/10.24112/ajsotl.12981>

Intercultural citizenship from an internationalist perspective

Abstract

The main purpose of this article is to present the concept of intercultural citizenship and its relationship to internationalism. In the first part, internationalism is distinguished from internationalisation in education, and from the notion of cosmopolitanism. Where internationalisation is largely a question of new activities within existing concepts of education, internationalism in education would promote the “bonding” of groups across national and state frontiers, and cosmopolitanism in education would aspire to over-rule the role of education in creating a sense of national allegiance and replace it with the promotion of an identification with human society as a whole. In the second part, intercultural citizenship is presented as the basis for dialogue among groups of different languages and cultures within and across nation-state boundaries. Education for intercultural citizenship, it is argued, needs to combine the objectives of foreign language education and citizenship/political education, and a brief example is given of how this can be done, with reference to a more comprehensive account elsewhere. The attraction of intercultural citizenship includes the opportunity for young people to engage in internationalism through international dialogue and action, thus reducing the prejudice engendered by national perspectives.

INTRODUCTION – THE INTERNATIONAL(IST) PERSPECTIVE

Too much has been said and written about globalisation to even begin to summarise here, but one account will provide an adequate starting point. Waters’ approach to definition is to imagine what a fully globalised world would look like:

In a globalized world there will be a single society and culture occupying the whole planet. (...) Importantly territoriality will disappear as an organizing principle for social and cultural life; it will be a society without borders and spatial boundaries. In a globalized world we will be unable to predict social practices and preferences on the basis of geographical location. Equally we can expect relationships between people in disparate locations to be formed as easily as relationships between people in proximate ones. We can therefore

define globalization as: *A social process in which the constraints of geography on economic, political, social and cultural arrangements recede, in which people become increasingly aware that they are receding and in which people act accordingly.*

(Waters, 2001, p.5)

It is noteworthy that Waters does not make any reference to nations or states but to a “single society and culture occupying the whole planet.” In such a thought experiment, nations and states disappear and yet, as many others have demonstrated (e.g. Smith, 2010), nationalism is a tenacious dimension of past, contemporary and very probably, future society. Globalisation is, it would be argued, unlikely to reach the extreme which Waters describes.

What then of internationalism as a possible alternative to globalisation without nations? Internationalism is surprisingly little researched by historians as Kuehl (2009) points out. Educationists too have had little to say about internationalism though the relationship of education to nationalism, to the creation of European states in the 19th century and other states on the European model in the 20th century, is well documented (Gellner, 1983; Hobsbawm, 1992; Kedourie, 1966). One educationist ventures a definition which he hopes will be uncontroversial:

What I mean by internationalism is a readiness to act on the assumption that mankind as a whole is the proper society to have in mind for matters that cannot with safety or with such good effect be left exclusively within the domain of smaller social groups such as nations. I think it will be agreed that this is not an extravagant definition.

(Elvin, 1960, p.16)

Elvin then goes on to a discussion of the role of education in internationalism but as internationalism might be confused with internationalisation in education, it is important for us to clarify the difference as a preliminary step.

Internationalisation is a concept much more widely discussed in connection with higher education than with reference to schools. Definitions of internationalisation have changed over time and oscillate between attempts at *a priori* definition and *a posteriori* description. Examples of the latter include Knight's (2009) list which includes “international activities” such as student and staff mobility, “delivery of education to other countries”, or an “international, intercultural and/or global dimension” in the curriculum. Deardorff (2004) cites the Association of International Education Administrators' definition: “the incorporation of international contents, materials, activities, and understanding in the teaching, research, and public service functions of universities to enhance their relevance in an interdependent world”

(Ellingboe, 1997, para. 5) and Deardorff combines this with a similar list from the American Council on Education to that produced by Knight.

In terms of an *a priori* definition, Knight offers “the process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purposes, functions or delivery of higher education”. What is notable here is the implication that current “purposes” of education remain fundamentally unchanged. Although new activities of an “international” nature are introduced, the dominance of the national location and character for educational institutions is not challenged.

In contrast internationalism is more than a set of activities. As Elvin quoted earlier says, it makes “mankind as a whole” the reference for a definition of society in order to counteract the dangers of the nation as the dominant entity. There have been several types of internationalism as analysed by Holbraad (2003) but he first offers a general description in which the term “ideology” is crucial:

Internationalism may be described as the ideology of international bonding. However, the bonds that link states, nations and groups of individuals and make up the multidimensional international society of the modern world are of several kinds and join together a broad variety of parties. (2003, p.1)

Existing groups, notably for our purposes nations and states¹, are participants in internationalism and remain intact parts of a whole. As Holbraad goes on to say, internationalism must be distinguished from cosmopolitanism:

Internationalism, it follows, is distinct from cosmopolitanism, which does not in its essence pertain to international society. Proclaiming a worldwide society of individuals that overrides states, nations and groups of people, it tends to disregard all kinds of international relations and to consider the society of human beings *en masse*. (2003, p.2)

Here we find echoes of Waters’ description of extreme globalisation, although Waters predicts that extreme globalisation would involve multi-centricity, high levels of differentiation and chaos, concepts which are not desirable connotations of “society”.

Although Holbraad hedges his distinction by saying that cosmopolitanism “tends” to ignore groups and focuses on individuals, it is this distinction which is important. Carter notes a change in usage from the 18th to the 19th centuries by protagonists of theory and practice:

¹ The equating of nation and state in the notion of nation-state is frequent and based on a 19th century ideology which we shall have to pass over here, but as we shall see later, the myth that states are nationally and ethnically homogeneous is gradually being recognised for what it is.

The idea of world citizenship was not invoked as frequently as it had been in the age of Enlightenment, although the label “cosmopolite” was still occasionally used. ... (2001, p.55)

She then makes from her own perspective a distinction which mirrors Holbraad:

the switch in terminology does suggest a slightly different emphasis; whereas cosmopolitanism stresses membership of the world, internationalism suggests that membership of the nation state as a starting point for joining with people in other countries. But the political effect of transnational organisations and movements was to influence international politics in a direction that is clearly cosmopolitan. (Carter, 2001)

Cosmopolitanism is therefore perhaps best seen as an aspiration which rejects the significance of the state or the nation as political entities and internationalism may be a stage on the way to the fulfilment of that aspiration for some people. For Hobsbawm (1988, p.7), however, cosmopolitanism is to be equated with “a-nationalism”:

In other words, internationalism is not the absence of concern with the nation, a-nationalism or cosmopolitanism, but the overcoming of the limits of the nation.

Internationalism does not necessarily involve the disappearance of the nation state.

The distinction of cosmopolitanism and internationalism is significant for education in that it also means that education systems would, in a cosmopolitan perspective, owe allegiance only to the world and not to a nation or state. The assumption is that any political structures will start at world level, with some notion of world government and associated entities. In an internationalist perspective, however, their function would be to “overcome the limits of the nation”, which may mean ultimately rejecting the nation or, as we saw Elvin arguing above, combining the best of both. The aims of citizenship education would differ considerably in a cosmopolitan and an internationalist perspective.

EDUCATION FOR CITIZENSHIP

If cosmopolitanism is an aspiration which, unrealistically, ignores the strength and tradition of the nation and the state, then cosmopolitan citizenship is also an aspiration in which the allegiance cultivated is to humanity rather than some part of it. Though the phrase is seldom used, international citizenship would in contrast recognise the reality of national and/or state allegiance. It would recognise that education for citizenship within state education system is likely to continue to

promote identification with the state². This is, let us call it, “traditional citizenship education” where the focus is on preparation of young people for living in their state – and regions and communities within it – but where there is little or no attention to preparation for living in a globalised economy or an international community.

The determination to continue to use the education system for “traditional citizenship education” is evident in new states such as Singapore. As a country with only half a century of history and a population of various ethnic origins, there is a need to deliberately create nationalist attachment. At the launch of “National Education”, which was expected to permeate the curriculum and complement the subject “Civics and Moral Education”, the then Minister-in-Charge DPM Lee Hsien Loong declared:

National Education aims to develop national cohesion, the instinct for survival and confidence in our future. (...) we must equip (students) with the basic attitudes, values and instincts which make them Singaporeans. This is the common culture that will give them a shared perception of life, and draw them closer together as one people when confronted with serious problems. This will give them a well-founded faith in the country’s future. This is the DNA to be passed from one generation to the next.

(Lee, 1997)

The metaphorical passing of DNA from one generation to the next suggests that adherence to the country should be biological, just as older states have often implied that there is a simple equation of people, nation and state.

In longer established countries, the curriculum need not make such open statements about the creation of allegiance but the purpose is still present. This can be illustrated with the case of English education – not, let it be noted, “British” education – where no explicit indication of national allegiance is present but a simple analysis of the text reveals key words and phrases – highlighted below – which bind the individual to the nation, through political literacy focused on a national level, and community activity focused on the local level:

Citizenship education has three related purposes:

1. Social and moral responsibility:

Learning self-confidence and socially and morally responsible behaviour

2 The position of “international” schools in this respect is an important question which I must, however, omit here.

2. Community involvement:

Becoming involved in the life of neighbourhood and communities, including learning through *community involvement* and *service* to the community

3. Political literacy:

Learning about the institutions, problems and practices of our democracy (...) how to *make themselves effective in the life of the nation* – a concept wider than political knowledge alone.

(Citizenship education in England, 2005)

There is no trace in either example – nor in others which could be cited from other countries – of a concern for internationalist “bonding”, still less for cosmopolitan aspirations³.

INTERCULTURAL CITIZENSHIP

Despite these traces of older concepts of the “nation-state”, where the hyphen implies that each state is made up of but one nation, there is in practice increasing recognition that, though many states have one dominant social group on which expectations of beliefs, values and behaviours are based and which is the model for education and citizenship, they also have within their borders many other groups with their own vision of what citizenship entails. In these circumstances the relationships among groups are crucial and the ability of individuals and groups to live and dialogue with individuals and groups of other identifications has been described as “intercultural citizenship”:

the idea of intercultural citizenship points to the building of political and social institutions by which culturally diverse communities within a multiethnic and multilingual nation can solve their differences democratically by consensus without tearing apart the common structures and values or having to abandon their particular cultural identities, such as language, culture and ethnicity.

(Stavenhagen, 2008, p.176)

Stavenhagen’s notion is developed from the UNESCO definition of interculturality – i.e. “the existence and equitable interaction of diverse cultures and the possibility of generating shared cultural expressions through dialogue and mutual respect” (2008, p.175) – but the focus in Stavenhagen’s definition of intercultural citizenship

3 The only example in the contemporary world of formalised attempt at internationalism is to be found in the European Union, where identification with member state and with Europe is the aim.

limits its scope to interculturality within the boundaries of the state. Crucially, there is an assumption that all those engaging in intercultural citizenship will speak the same language, or that interlingual comprehension and interaction will be no more difficult than intralingual. Furthermore, this continues the focus of citizenship education on the local and the national to the exclusion of the international.

The limitations of this view are one starting point for a theory of education for “intercultural citizenship” which combines insights from language learning and citizenship education. Essentially my proposal is to combine the notion of intercultural communicative competence (Byram, 1997) with that of “Demokratie Lernen” (literally: learning democracy) as promoted in Germany, notably by Himmelmann (2007). The aim is to define the competences which would enable an individual to engage in political activity – “community involvement and service” to use the phrase from the English national curriculum quoted above – with people of another state and a different language from their own. This would provide the context for the “bonding” of internationalism and perhaps the aspirations of cosmopolitanism. This aim would break through the limitations of education for citizenship focused only on the local and the national, and at the same time it would introduce into foreign language education an element of commitment or engagement which it currently lacks. For foreign language teaching has hitherto engaged with teaching knowledge about and the study of language – the dominant approach until the middle of the 20th century – and then teaching the skills and knowing how to use language for communication from the mid-century onwards, culminating in the notion of “communicative competence”. The second approach in particular lacks a content, something to communicate about; the first approach made language itself – the study of grammar and philology – the content, sometimes accompanied by study of “the culture” associated with the language. In neither case was there a concern with the social significance of language learning, and providing a content through citizenship education not only gives language learning such significance but also responds to the research which says that languages are best acquired when there is a content (“content-based instruction in the USA” and “Content and Language Integrated Learning” in Europe).

In other words, there is a potential for enrichment of citizenship education with an international dimension and of language education with a political/citizenship dimension, resulting in “intercultural political competence”. Establishing these links and common ground does not exhaust the content and purposes of either citizenship or foreign language education, but as we shall see below, the general dimensions of attitudes, knowledge and behaviour common to citizenship and language education provide a framework which makes the relationship between intercultural (communicative) competence and political competence visible, and is a tool for curriculum design and the planning of teaching and assessment.

A full explanation of the overlap in thinking about citizenship competences and those pursued for intercultural communicative competence is available elsewhere (Byram, 2008) and here space allows only an overview.

The framework I propose has three levels:

- At the highest level, there are “orientations” – cognitive, evaluative and action.
- At the second level, the specific competences in citizenship and in foreign language education are presented in relation to the over-arching orientations.
- At the third level, the specific objectives for each type of education are formulated; it is at this level that the interaction and mutual influence of the types of education is realisable in curriculum design.

Here I will give the example of the “evaluative orientation”. From the objectives of foreign language education we take the notion of “willingness/ readiness to suspend belief about one’s own culture and disbelief about others”, i.e. a willingness to question what one usually takes for granted and to accept that others have their own taken-for-granted world which one needs to engage with. In comparison, Himmelmann’s (2003) eight elements of affective/ moral attitudes also refer to the need to respect pluralism, co-operation, equality, the contribution of other cultures to human development and the valuing of the fight against racism, prejudice and discrimination. The language education objectives place more emphasis on willingness to take up opportunities of living with people of other cultures, whereas political/ democratic education emphasises recognition of universal rights, trust in democratic principles and peaceful resolution of conflict. These different but complementary elements, are the pre-conditions for interaction with others, whether they are from the same nation-state and society or a foreign one.

Taking an intercultural competence perspective, there is an additional element to the evaluative orientation, the concept of “critical cultural awareness” (Byram, 1997). The emphasis here is on awareness that one’s own values and ideological perspectives are culturally determined and that they may not be compatible with those of other people. This also applies to the value attached to democracy, which is largely taken for granted in “learning democracy”, or at least assumed to be the appropriate ideology for Europe and the West. In acquiring critical cultural awareness, learners become aware of the culturally determined origins and nature of democracy and the way it can unconsciously shape their evaluative response to other ideologies and forms of government or other kinds of democracy. Secondly, they become aware that agreement is not always possible, or perhaps only partial agreement is possible, among disparate ideologies. It is therefore wrong for one group to impose its ideology on another – by any means, whether violent or not – and the learner who has critical cultural awareness can reflect critically on their own ideology as seen from the perspective of others. Only intercultural dialogue can be the basis of ultimate agreement on common values.

INTERCULTURAL CITIZENSHIP FOR INTERNATIONALIST ENGAGEMENT

In intercultural citizenship, the question of national or cosmopolitan allegiances is not important; intercultural citizenship is not a matter of creating identifications with state or any other entity. It is, rather, the development of competences to engage with others in political activity across linguistic and cultural boundaries both within and across state frontiers. International “bonds” – and the reduction of prejudice – are the intended outcomes, and cosmopolitan aspirations may well evolve at the same time. Intercultural citizenship education creates the potential for dialogue and the significance of dialogue as a condition of engagement is made clear by Habermas who argues that the model of citizenship which should replace out-dated concepts of “the classic republican idea of the self-conscious political integration of a community of free and equal persons”, is a model dependent on communication flows:

a model of deliberative democracy, that no longer hinges on the assumption of macro-subjects like the “people” or “the” community but on anonymously interlinked discourses or flows of information.

(Habermas, 1994, p.32)

Although Habermas is alluding here to the evolution of the nation-state, it is equally valid for the evolution of democratic processes in international contexts. However, communication flows and the “informal networks of public communication” at an international level pre-suppose favourable conditions for mutual understanding. Habermas himself does not appear to take the necessity of language competence within or beyond the state into consideration.

When however language and culture competences are combined with political competences, the potential for international networks of public communication is attractive. Education for citizenship may well continue to include the creation of national allegiance in its aims, but it would reject the limitations of nationalism and promote an internationalist and cosmopolitan purpose as of equal value.

REFERENCES

- Byram, M. (1997). *Teaching and assessing intercultural communicative competence*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
- Byram, M. (2008). *From foreign language education to education for intercultural citizenship*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
- Carter, A. (2001). *The political theory of global citizenship*. London: Routledge.
- Citizenship education in England (from Ministry website in the early days of national curriculum for Citizenship Education). Retrieved January 2005, from <http://www.ncaction.org.uk/subjects/citizen/index.htm>
- Deardorff, D. (2004). *The identification and assessment of intercultural competence as a student outcome of internationalization at institutions of higher education in the United States*. (Unpublished PhD thesis). North Carolina State University, USA.
- Ellingboe, B. J. (1997). The most frequently asked questions about internationalization. Retrieved February 20, 1998, from <http://education.umn.edu/IntEduc/Int.FAQs.html>
- Elvin, H. L. (1960). Nationalism and internationalism in education. *The School Review*, 68 (1), 1-22.
- Gellner, E. (1983). *Nations and nationalism*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Habermas, J. (1994). Citizenship and national identity. In B. van Steebergen (Ed.), *The condition of citizenship*. London: Sage.
- Himmelmann, G. (2003). *Zukunft, Fachidentität und Standards der politischen Bildung*. (Unpublished manuscript.) Braunschweig: TU Braunschweig, Institut für Sozialwissenschaften.
- Himmelmann, G. (2007). *Demokratie lernen: Als Lebens-, Gesellschafts- und Herrschaftsform. Ein Lehr- und Arbeitsbuch*. Schwalbach/Ts.: Wochenschau-Verlag.
- Hobsbawm, E. J. (1988). Working class internationalism. In F. van Holthoon & M. van der Linden (Eds.), *Internationalism in the labour movement Vol I* (pp. 3-16). Leiden: E J Brill.
- Hobsbawm, E. J. (1992). *Nations and nationalism since 1780*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Holbraad, C. (2003). *Internationalism and nationalism in European political thought*. Basingstoke: Palgrave.
- Kedourie, E. (1966). *Nationalism*. London: Hutchinson.
- Knight, J. (2009). The internationalization of higher education – are we on the right track? Academic Matters. Retrieved January 15, 2011 from http://www.academicmatters.ca/current_issue.article.gk?catalog_item_id=1234&category=featured_articles
- Kuehl, W. F. (2009). Concepts of internationalism in history. *Peace and Change*, 11 (2), 1-10.
- Lee, H. L. (1997, May). National education. Speech by BG Lee Hsien Loong, Deputy Prime Minister at the Launch of National Education on Saturday 17 May 1997 at TCS TV Theatre at 9.30 am, Singapore. Retrieved from <http://www.moe.gov.sg/media/speeches/1997/170597.htm>
- Smith, A. (2010). *Nationalism: theory, ideology, history*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Stavenhagen, R. (2008). Building intercultural citizenship through education: a human rights approach. *European Journal of Education*, 43 (2), 161-179.
- Waters, M. (2001). (2nd ed). *Globalization*. London: Routledge.