"We've formed a national Gender and Citizenship Education Society in Sri Lanka"

Pedagogies and the process of change in postgraduate studies with senior teacher educators.

Dr Victoria Foster
Adjunct Associate Professor
Division of Communication and Education
University of Canberra
email: vfoster@uow.edu.au

Paper presented at the International Conference of the Australian Association for Research in Education

In the Symposium "Identity challenges citizenship: And what of civics education?"

The University of Notre Dame Fremantle Western Australia December 2001
"We've formed a national Gender and Citizenship Education Society in Sri Lanka"

Pedagogies and the process of change in postgraduate studies with senior teacher educators.

Victoria Foster

Abstract

In 1999, a newly developed graduate course on "Gender and Citizenship" at an Australian regional university attracted a group of Australian and international students, mostly from what are usually described as marginalized positionings. This presentation reports on longitudinal research with ten of these students, eight male and two female Sri Lankan senior teacher educators. Innovative pedagogies were developed collaboratively and the students were asked to keep detailed journals of their experiences in the course, and to submit two evaluations. Their responses suggest new answers and meanings to Spivak's (1987) question, "Can the subaltern speak?" Follow-up research with the students in 2000 after their return to their colleges in Sri Lanka revealed profound change, both personal and professional. A further study is planned for 2002.

As Arnot and Dillabough (2000) note, the emerging field of citizenship education is seriously un(der)theorized, particularly in relation to the vast literature on feminist theory and citizenship. The research questions in the present study are: what is the nature of changes in the students' construction of their own identity in relation to gender and citizenship issues in the longer term, and what is the impact of these changes? This presentation explores the students' responses after nearly three years, and my own reflections on what occurred.

Introduction

This paper is set in the context of an international education climate increasingly beset with contradictions and paradoxes in relation to gender equality issues. On the one hand, so-called developed western nations such as Australia and the UK are obsessed with claims that boys are the new disadvantaged (Weiner, Arnot and David, 1997), the new "second sex" in what has been dubbed the predominant education discourse of the 90s. On the other hand, in less developed countries such as Laos and Sri Lanka, this discourse is yet to emerge as girls struggle even to gain access to schooling. The paper presents longitudinal research on profound long-term personal and professional change in the lives of eight male and two female Sri Lankan senior teacher educators, following a Masters program in "Gender and Citizenship".

Earlier work (Foster, 1997; 2000) has included theoretical critiques of citizenship education in relation to the existing literature in philosophy and political theory on the gendered nature of citizenship. And in recent work (Foster 2001), I examine the implications of the relationship between two contemporary international trends in education for women’s equality as citizens. The first trend is that in most western countries, girls are now achieving statistically slightly better average school-leaving results than boys, in turn occasioning a hostile populist ‘backlash’ against this success (Foster, 2001; Martino and Meyenn, 2001). For example, a recent international collection (Mackinnon, Elgqvist-Saltzman and Prentice, 1998) argues that education in the twenty-first century will be "dangerous terrain" for women, underwriting the "natural non-citizenship of women" (Castles and Davidson, 1999; Yuval Davis, 1997). The second trend is the revival of interest in participatory democratic theory which is reflected in the strong current focus on civics and citizenship education in education systems.
This previous work addresses the specific question of what happens to the social and educational order when girls begin to gain access to the traditional masculine public spheres of male-dominated curriculum areas (Foster, 1992; 1994). A further question concerns the implications for both girls and boys as learner-citizens, of this greater access (Foster, 1996a; 2000a; 2001). The conclusion of this work is that in the present international climate, it is impossible for girls to be equal with boys as learner-citizens. Girls remain adjuncts to the male learner-citizen, a problem which is not addressed in current models of citizenship education (Foster, 2000b; in press). The two trends under discussion are contradictory, positioning girls within a dialectic of desire and threat in their quests for citizenship (see Foster, 1996b; 1998; 2000b).

In relation to the problem of a lack of a theoretical framework for citizenship education, Arnot and Dillabough (2000:21) note, "important links between feminist political theory and feminist educational theory have not always been made explicit. As a consequence, education feminism has not had sufficient impact on the restructuring of citizenship and the formation of citizenship education". Furthermore, Halstead (2000:9) argues that the lack of a cogent theoretical framework for addressing the gendered nature of citizenship education as it is currently taught highlights the need for a moral critique of citizenship and citizenship education. Such a critique could profitably begin with Pateman's (1988) notion of the "sexual contract" and its implications for both boys and girls as learner-citizens.

Teaching and learning "Gender and Citizenship"

In February 1999, I introduced a new Masters subject "Gender and Citizenship" at a small NSW regional University. This subject matter is still taught in very few Universities despite the renewed interest in citizenship issues in education (Cambridge and OISE are examples of other programs). This University has a collaborative World Bank-funded program with the National Institute of Education in Sri Lanka in which senior teacher educators are selected for postgraduate study. Of the thirty-two students in the 1999 cohort, eight men and two women, a ratio roughly representative of the total cohort, enrolled in "Gender and Citizenship". I had given a detailed presentation on the subject to the whole group, and the ten students had either done a previous course with me or received favourable reports on my teaching from other former students. This relatively high enrolment evoked shocked responses in some Faculty members, of both a sexist and racist nature ("how are you going to teach that stuff to men?"; how are you going to teach third-world students?"). Five other students enrolled: a male PE teacher, a female senior English teacher, a female member of the local Council, an Aboriginal male and a female Papua New Guinea social worker. Of the eight male Sri Lankans, two are Muslim, two are Tamils and eight are Buddhists. The two women are Buddhists.

Course objectives and assessment

The following are the course description, objectives and major essay:

The subject has an international and comparative focus on gender issues, specifically related to schooling, adult education, and employment settings. It takes an interdisciplinary and cross-disciplinary approach to the consideration of theoretical, policy and curriculum issues in the broad areas of social justice and equality, relating to the emerging field of civics and citizenship education. The subject explores the notion of "the modern citizen" and his/her relationship with the public and private spheres of social life, and with democratic institutions such as education.

On completing this subject successfully, students should be able to demonstrate they can:

1. relate Australian and international policy developments in education and employment to gender issues in citizenship curriculum development.
2. describe and predict the impact of gender on the experiences of all participants in education and employment settings.

3. employ several theoretical approaches to addressing selected current issues in the field of gender studies.

4. critically analyze the processes of the construction of gender, and their consequences for the modern citizen.

5. apply enhanced skills of research, investigation and critical analysis.

Major Essay

Consider the four quotes below as a starting point for the essay. In your essay discuss two or three of the major theoretical issues which emerge in the literature on gender and citizenship. You may wish to show the interrelationship between these issues. Then specifically describe the implications of these issues for citizenship education. This essay topic aims to give you wide scope to explore issues which particularly interest you. It also requires you to show evidence of careful reading and an excellent understanding of the literature in this field.

You may wish to discuss your topic with Dr Foster.

1. "Never has a people perished from an excess of wine; all perish from the disorder of women" (Pateman, "Rousseau, Politics and the Arts" in The Disorder of Women)

2. "Women are incorporated into a sphere that both is and is not in civil society" (Pateman, The Sexual Contract, p. 11)

3. "Education, then, can be seen to be concerned primarily with the initiation of young men as citizens into the "productive" processes of society and its culture. The relationship of young women to these educative priorities and processes continues to be something about which very little is known" (Foster, 1992, p.58)

4. "An important aspect of this identity politics is its challenge to the traditional restriction of the concept of citizen to the public sphere. The arena of citizenship has been the formal institutions of politics and law, and the definition of citizen rights have been located in these institutional relationships. It has therefore been difficult to include within this traditional concept a range of interperson and intrapersonal concerns. It has also meant that where these issues have been acknowledged, their solution has been conceived in formal legal terms which have often proven inadequate to the task at hand. The consequence is that, for instance, recognising rights and obligations in the workplace or the home are not seen as part of being a citizen, and the ethics on which relationships are to be based are sought in established legal principle rather than the development of human values. Given the importance of these aspects of life, this is a limited concept of citizenship.

A key example of this problem is in the area of gender. Young (1987) argues that modern political theory has entrenched the dichotomy between reason and desire in the distinction between the universal, public realm of sovereignty and the state on the one hand, and the particular private realm of needs and desires on the other. The state has attained its generality by excluding particularity, desire, feeling and those aspects of life associated with the body. As a result, domestic violence, the sexual division of labour, and sexual preference have struggled to be recognised as issues worthy of consideration as parts of the rights of citizenship. Similar difficulties have faced ethnic minorities in extending the fight against racism beyond the formal equalities of political and legal process". (Gilbert, in Kennedy (1997) p. 79)
Flying blind: A personal story of passion in teaching and learning

My initial challenge lay in devising ways of making this very new field of teaching in an area of highly complex theory accessible and exciting for a majority of second-language speakers. In fact, what resulted for me was one of the most creative and exciting teaching experiences of my career. Much of this was due to the strong values of intercultural interest and a deep respect for difference which developed in the group as a whole. Another factor was the strong motivation of the Sri Lankan students to get to grips with the material from the start, and to achieve good results. This created an atmosphere of valuing intellectual challenge and accepting new ideas, which gradually came to be applied to the students' personal and professional experiences.

I began the course by laying a firm foundation for the theoretical terrain to be explored, and my expectations of the students. I made it clear that I would provide strong support both in class and at other times, for the discussion of new and unfamiliar ideas. Before the first meeting, I explained some of the key theoretical ideas, such as Pateman's (1988) concept of the "sexual contract", and the students were asked to come to the first class having read Foster (1997) and to be prepared to discuss six issues that "jumped out of the reading" for them. All students completed this task, some exceptionally well. It became a joy for me to see the students move fairly quickly from an initial position of believing "there is no problem in Sri Lanka; the mother is revered" to extended work applying notions like the sexual contract in their own lives, both professional and personal. The students were asked to keep personal journals recording their experiences, which they would be free to share with the group if they wished. Each student submitted two evaluations at the end of the course, one formal and the other more reflective.

Curricular and pedagogical strategies in the teaching of Gender and Citizenship with second-language learners

• Early introduction of complex theoretical material

• Support through easy access to the literature and research, via a book of Course Readings, as well as frequent individual and group consultation time

• Facilitating students' early identification and exploration of key theoretical concepts, in their own personal and professional environments eg the gendered nature of citizenship; the "sexual contract"

• Fostering a group process valuing trust, openness, risk-taking and the sharing of ideas

• Supporting personal and professional change

• Assessment tasks with both a theoretical and practical focus eg critiquing citizenship education kits and devising a curriculum development plan in crosscultural and cross-gender groups

• Providing a structure for moving forward focused on applying new learnings in the Sri Lankan context, and possible future evaluative research

Facilitating personal and professional change in gender issues in education

• Challenging and stimulating: engendering pride in thinking about difficult new ideas which challenge existing assumptions and received wisdom

• Motivating: why should you do this? Educationists as agents for change and action researchers
• Reinforcing new concepts eg gender is socially and historically constructed
• Allowing time and space for gradual change
• Emphasis on reflection, personal and professional
• Supporting feelings of being overwhelmed: "don't panic"
• Encouraging an atmosphere of tolerance and willingness to change
• Valuing intercultural differences about gender
• Regular consultation opportunities
• Not a transfer of knowledge but creating new knowledge together
• Directed towards practical implementation and evaluation
• Modelling all of the above: teaching with love
• Lighting the lamp: Being a collaborator, facilitator, teacher, mentor, guide, model, support, catalyst for change

The first research evaluation study

I had spoken in detail with the students about the possibility of my being able to visit them in Sri Lanka to do follow-up research. They welcomed this idea warmly, although at the time of their leaving Australia at the conclusion of the course in July 1999, it was only an idea. I did, however, subsequently receive a small research grant of $2000 which enabled me to carry out a follow-up study in February 2000, some nine months after the course completion. This took place during a 3-day workshop at the National Institute of Education in Colombo. The study was strongly supported by the Director-General Mr Nihal Cooray. All but one of the students attended despite the on-going civil strife which made travel difficult, especially for those in the north. An additional male student joined the now-research group. This was interesting because he had been the only student to drop out of the course, saying it was too difficult. He now became vitally interested in the research process and strongly supportive of the new and future initiatives undertaken by the group to continue the work nationally after the evaluation study.

The research took the form of a lengthy focus group discussion with all the students, using a semi-structured interview method, which proceeded informally to maximise the students' ease and comfort with the process. The students were then asked individually to complete a written open-ended questionnaire which gave full scope for comments. They then attended a one-to-one interview where I discussed their responses and invited them to elaborate. These interviews were extremely moving experiences both for myself and for the former students, who had now become co-researchers. When I undertook the study, I was quite prepared to find little or no lasting change, believing that the excitement of the course would have evaporated in the reality of returning to one of the most difficult and dangerous contexts in which to initiate educational change, and in one of the most challenging areas of educational change, gender relations! I couldn't have been more wrong. My first impression on meeting the group in Colombo was of a group of people jumping out of their skins with excitement about the changes that had occurred in their lives since last we met. Indeed, powerful themes of change emerged from the data.
Themes of change: Personal and professional

• Professional change: No longer "Boys are treasures of the community" (Muslim male)

• Transformation, a "revolution in the classroom": "First I hated this subject; now I see through the gender and citizenship eye, not the science eye" (Buddhist male)

• Personal change: "My mother was a servant with no power; I don't want to be like my father; I have changed my family life" (Tamil, Buddhist and Muslim males)

• A wider human rights context: change extended to influence the new National Integration Project on Multiculturalism and Women's Rights, to prevent human rights abuses

• Wide application in teacher education and curriculum change: being a model for change towards egalitarianism and respect for women. "I will change myself first and then society".

• Future professional development initiative: formation of the Sri Lankan National Society for Gender and Citizenship

• Personal and professional reflection: "Education is a treasure within. My job is to release this treasure; to learn to know, do, be, live together" (Buddhist male)

Future research plans

A second follow-up study had been planned for September 2001, but had to be postponed because of instability within Sri Lanka and internationally. This study is now planned for February 2002. One of the male students has since won a World Bank Scholarship for doctoral studies and hopes to work in the area of gender and citizenship under my supervision.

Concluding remarks

Achieving change in gender issues in education in western countries like Australia has proved to be well nigh impossible; indeed, as Martino and Meyenn (2001:1) note, countries such as Great Britain, the United States and Australia are currently experiencing "a feminist backlash rhetoric (which) informs the moral panic suffusing the debates about boys education". Likewise, challenging notions of hegemonic masculinity has proved extremely difficult in those countries. It therefore seems paradoxical and contradictory that the eight males who have participated in the on-going teaching/learning/research experiences reported here have been able to achieve such significant life changes in relation to fundamental gender issues, bearing on their lives as citizens, and the lives of those around them. This paper has gestured towards some of the complex reasons for these changes. However, I hope these will become clearer as this longitudinal research progresses into the next stage.
References


