Community Service Learning: An Approach to Facilitate Citizenship Education in Higher Education

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Abstract

Based on the discussion about the current situation of citizenship education in higher education in the UK, including the considerable similarity between the aim of citizenship education and that of higher education, and the relatively weak status of citizenship education in higher education, this paper draws attention on community service learning, one of whose features is community involvement. It tries to argue that community service learning, which emphasizes on both community service and outcomes, could be an effective way for university students to participate practically in community and gain knowledge, skills and attitudes for being active citizens, and, could be a feasible approach for universities to replay its civic role in communities. In a word, learning through Community service as an approach is worthy of taking into account if citizenship education is to be facilitated further in higher education.
INTRODUCTION

Citizenship education has been introduced formally in secondary schools in the UK while citizenship education in higher education seems still implicit and subtle. The two aims of this essay are to introduce community service learning as an approach for learning for active citizenship in higher education based on a general picture of citizenship education in higher education; and to provide the discussion of the link between community service learning and higher education.

There are two sections in this essay. In section one, citizenship education in modern higher education in the UK will be explored through considering two questions: to what extent the aim of citizenship education is consistent with the nature and purpose of higher education and to what extent citizenship education exists in modern universities.

In section two, based on the background of citizenship education in higher education in the UK, community service learning will be introduced as an approach to learn for active citizenship in higher education. The emergence and development of service learning in education will be reviewed before the discussion as to why and how service learning could be employed in citizenship education in higher education.
SECTION ONE: CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Political context

Although there is little resonance in the language of citizenship and its cognates and a lack of a strong tradition of citizenship education in the UK (Ahier, et al., 2003), ‘the issue of citizenship, with its all complexity, has become central to contemporary political debate and a strategic subject area within the academy’ (Annette, 2000, p.109). With the increasing public perception of the limitations of liberal social democracy, the scepticism about the future of social democratic politics and the requirement for an alternative politics of meaning (Annette, 2000), the New Labour government espouses a programme of civic renewal that is influenced by civic republicanism. It aims to advocate ‘active citizenship’ in both political participation and civil society and to emphasize individual responsibility in the democratic community.

The Home Secretary, David Blunkett indicated that

the ‘civic republican’ tradition of democratic thought has always been an important influence for me…This tradition offers us a substantive account of the importance of the community, in which duty and civic virtues play a strong and formative role.

(Blunkett, 2001, p. 19)

In the eyes of politicians citizenship education could be embraced as a direct and effective way to provide citizens with abilities to be active citizens in democratic society, namely

the literacy required to live in a civil society, the competence to participate in democratic communities, the ability to think critically and act deliberately in a pluralist world, the empathy that permits us to hear and thus accommodate others, all involve skills that must be acquired.

(Barber, 1992, cited from Annette, 2005, p. 328)

These abilities are classified and analyzed systematically by the Crick Report, *Education for Citizenship and Teaching Democracy in Schools*, which was published by the Advisory...
Group on Citizenship and provides a clear definition and outcomes of citizenship education. Although the statement of definition and outcomes is for schools particularly, it is in relation to citizenship education in higher education since higher education is also a part of the process of education for citizenship. The report considers citizenship education comprises three separate but interrelated strands: social and moral responsibility, community involvement and political literacy. Also, it stresses that ‘citizenship education is education for citizenship, behaving and acting as a citizen, therefore it is not just knowledge of citizenship and civic society; it also implies developing values, skills and understanding’ that related to become informed and active citizens (QCA, 1998, p. 13).

Citizenship education and higher education

It is possible to argue that although the Crick Report is not concerned particularly with citizenship education in higher education, the purpose of citizenship education to a considerable degree is accordant with that of higher education. In 1997 the Dearing Report Higher Education in the Learning Society stated that:

higher education continues to have a role in the nation’s social, moral and spiritual life; in transmitting citizenship and culture in all its variety; and in enabling personal development for the benefit of individuals and society as a whole.

(NCIHE, 1997, Terms of Reference: Annex A)

This statement might be followed by an earlier argument made by the Robbins Report (1963, cited from Annette, 2000, p. 113) that one of aims of higher education is to ‘transmit a common culture and standards of citizenship’. Moreover, Mattson et al. (1997) argue that higher education is still a part of an individual’s continual process of ‘character development’ and growth in enlightened virtue, that higher education has a civic mission, which means that
institutions of higher education has a responsibility in developing public citizens and engaging in surrounding communities.

Education for citizenship in higher education, however, appears not at the centre of the current concern, both in terms of the development of citizenship education and that of higher education.

Firstly, in terms of the development of citizenship education, at present most politicians and educators are involved in implementing citizenship education into primary and secondary schools. One of the successes is that since 2002 citizenship education has become a required subject in secondary schools. It seems, however, that there are no explicit recommendations and measures for promoting education for citizenship in higher education in political reports. Indeed, the Crick Report states that ‘post-16 education has not fallen within our remit, we have not made detailed recommendations in this area’ (QCA, 1998, sect. 5.5.7). Besides the 1998 Crick Report, it is fair to say that the separate Crick Report *Citizenship for 16-19 Year Olds in Education and Training* does consider that citizenship should form an essential and explicit part in post-16 education and training (FEFC, 2000). This report, however, focuses on age 16-19 and covers several aspects extensively, including sixth form education, vocational training education and higher education. There is a lack of focus and an absence of concrete recommendations of citizenship education in higher education in this report.

Secondly, in terms of the development of higher education, the rhetoric of civic republicanism and the promotion of citizenship responsibility are absent in most of the mission statements of universities and colleges of higher education in the UK (Annette, 2005). For example, although the main organization of university heads, ‘Universities, UK’, has
carried on research about universities and communities, there are no arguments about ‘how the undergraduate curriculum might enable students to develop their moral and civic capacity for active citizenship’ and no discussion about the wider civic role of universities (Annette, 2005, p. 331). The latter absence also indicates that the civic role of higher education, which at present there are just only a few researchers in the UK making an effort to argue for (e.g. Ahier, *et al.*, 2003; Annette, 2000), seems to be ignored in the development of modern universities.

The reasons that education for citizenship loses sight of its relation to higher education could be explored from the dramatic changes of the nature of higher education, which are mainly in terms of the social role of higher education, and the institutional form and system of modern universities.

The social role of higher education changed considerably in the last two centuries. Mattson *et al.* (1997) argued that in the nineteenth century the American colleges, which even if were to foster elites in society, commonly had a strong sense of civic responsibilities and a relation to a wider process of civic education. British universities at that time also had the same awareness. For instance, civic ideals and the study of moral philosophy were merged into the undergraduate curriculum in Scottish universities, which is a part of the Scottish Enlightenment (Annette, 2005). Since the twentieth century Higher education has changed its social role from an elite system to a mass education both in the USA and the UK. In the UK, the financial lean on the government and the marketisation of higher education lead universities to compete for funding and students by focusing emphatically upon career development and meeting the demands of the labour market (Ahier, *et al.*, 2003). One of
reflections of this is the recent government white paper, *The Future of Higher Education*. It emphasizes heavily the funding mechanisms for higher education and the need for more technology and business partnerships (Annette, 2005) but fails to address the civic purpose of higher education. The change of social role of higher education results in the shift of the emphasis of higher education, and consequently, the weakening of education for citizenship in higher education.

Alongside the change of social role of higher education, a modern institutional form and system of universities, which is called discipline-based institution, emerges in modern universities.

Mattson *et al.* (1997) considered that in the USA a new model of university, which was based on German reforms in higher education and focused on training students in clear demarcated disciplines and professions, formed at the end of nineteenth century and provided the basis of the modern university. This model was also embraced gradually in the UK in twentieth century. While higher education turned to a mass education in the UK in twentieth century, as Annette (2000) discusses, the rise of the multiversity began accordingly. It consists of ‘many academic departments and institutes, where the totality of the whole is organized on the pragmatic principles of administrative convenience’ (p. 114). The separated and semi-autonomous departments and institutes cause not only what Halsey terms the decline of donnish dominion but also the growth of the power and influence of the academic disciplines and their professional identities (Annette, 2000). In addition, in universities an increasing emphasis is placed on providing students with the professional knowledge, which is the prerequisite for becoming a member of a profession and developing a career within a
certain field. Under the influence of this emphasis, the role of universities that as a part of a wider process of citizenship education declines.

The discipline-based institution in universities could be the barrier for promoting education for active citizenship universally in higher education. In terms of the direction of cultivation and training, knowledge, skills and understanding of civic ideal in public life are replaced by professionalized and disciplinary knowledge. Moreover, as Annette (2000) argues, citizenship education as a subject area is substantially interdisciplinary and there is a challenge to implement citizenship education comprehensively in separated academic disciplines. Considered the university as a whole, reintroducing citizenship education, which is a meta-discipline, into the development of a curriculum framework for the whole academic community is also far from simple. It is because that the common academic community seems disappeared on campus, which is divided by narrow departmental interest, and that it is difficult for a wider objective such as education for citizenship to transcend individual disciplines and exist in the discipline based curriculum.

Although citizenship education in higher education seems to be not the central concern in both the development of citizenship education and that of higher education, relevant political agencies and reports do place citizenship education in post-16 education, including higher education, as a necessary aspect to develop. In the Crick Report, it is recognized that ‘if citizenship education is to be accepted as important, not only for schools but for the life of the nation, it must continue beyond the age of 16’ (QCA, 1998, sect. 5.5.8). Similarly, the separate Crick Report also considers citizenship as a life skill and argues that all young adults should have an entitlement for citizenship education based on participation (FEFC, 2000).
More recently the Civil Renewal Unit of the Home Office is operating programmes for adult learning for active citizenship, including volunteering, community involvement and the activity of becoming a UK citizen (Annette, 2005). These statements and programmes not only provide the basis for establishing a provision for lifelong learning for active citizenship and civic renewal but also support the facilitation of education for citizenship in higher education.

With the background of the present context of citizenship education and higher education and the discussion about the relationship between the two, it is now appropriate to discuss a practical approach that is suitable for teaching citizenship education at modern universities: community service learning.
SECTION TWO: COMMUNITY SERVICE LEARNING AS AN APPROACH

In this section it will be argued that community service learning could be an effective learning experience for students in higher education to realize an education for citizenship. After discussing the development of service learning in the USA and the UK, two main questions that why and how service learning can be used in education for citizenship in higher education will be explored respectively.

What is community service learning?

At the core of community service learning, also called active learning in the community or community based learning, is the pedagogy of experiential learning, which is based on the thought of John Dewey (Annette, 2000). The basis of this kind of learning is the reflection of students on their activity of volunteering, civic engagement and community involvement. As a form of learning it is ‘based not just on experience but on a structured learning experience with measurable learning outcomes’ (Annette, 2005, p.333).

What should be noted is that community service learning is in significant respect different from the traditional forms of community service, which has a long and honourable tradition in Britain education (CSV, 2001). The learning outcomes are the distinction between the two. Through community service learning students acquire experience and, more emphatically, certain knowledge and ability. The latter one is not the focus of community service. As the statement in the CSV guide (2001), community service learning ‘links service with learning and learning with service’ (p. 3). The interactional relationship between
learning and community service provides a foundation that community service learning as a learning approach could be used in education for citizenship, which requires learning to take place beyond as well as in the classroom and in which community involvement is highly emphasized.

In addition, community service based on the idea of communitarian is a controversial issue. It could lead to a certain sort of action by certain persons that have the luxury of time and energy. In this sense, community service or volunteering is considered as a middle class charity work. Furthermore, some people’s rights that should have been guaranteed by the state might become the supposed benefit of volunteering (Frazer, 1999). The controversy of community service results in the complexity of community service learning. What can be involved in community service learning, how to provide opportunity for community service learning and how to guarantee community service learning is not limited in certain persons need to be discussed continuously by the educators and politicians. These questions are not discussed in this essay since this essay is linking community service learning as an approach of learning to citizenship education in higher education and discussing the fitness of the link.

The development of community service learning

Community service learning as a form of learning has been developed for a long period especially in the USA. It was not introduced firstly in education for citizenship, but as a new form of learning to encourage students’ active learning.

It is considered by Annette (2000) that there has been a tradition of community-based internship and experiential education in the USA since the 1960s. From that time educators
have argued that students can be engaged in active learning through service. The advocates of
service learning emphasize that ‘environments where students serve, when coupled with
spaces to draw lessons from their activities, invite them to become engaged in the
unpredictable dynamics of experiencing and learning’ (Mattson et al., 1997). Mattson et al.
(1997) discuss that community service learning, which is based upon the principles of
experiential education, not only defies the notion that knowledge can be strictly
compartmentalized within distinct spheres and disciplines but also engages students in
communities and society.

The features of community service learning, which are crossing disciplines and linking
closely to community, fit the nature of education for citizenship. Since the 1990s the new
emphasis in the USA has been on the link between service learning and citizenship education
(Annette, 2000). The capacity of service learning to increase reflective, active and critical
engagement in the everyday activities of public life makes service learning ‘an indispensable
element of citizenship education’ (Mattson et al., 1997). Similarly, Annette (2005)
paraphrases Barber’s suggestion that the engagement of critical thinking and community
service learning is the effective way for education for active citizenship in higher education.

There is also an increasing influence of the pedagogy of community service learning in
higher education in the UK. According to the Dearing Report, universities seem to be
suggested to facilitate service learning in teaching key skills, not in education for citizenship
at the beginning, although now the fitness and importance of community service learning in
education for citizenship start to be recognized.

The similarity between the elements of key skills and those of skills for active citizens,
for example, communication skills, critical thinking and problem solving, raises the possibility of introducing community service learning into education for citizenship in higher education. What is missed in the Dearing Report is the direct address of the links between higher education and citizenship education, between community service learning and citizenship education, the explicit consideration of how the university curriculum should take into account the needs for citizenship education.

In the UK, there is now a variety of experiential and active learning pedagogy introduced in universities and a number of pilot student leadership programmes (for example, the York Award). These programmes link to service learning and citizenship education through a variety of ways such as the development of the skills of critical thinking and problem solving. A direct and full-scale link between citizenship education and community service learning, however, seems to be missed in universities even though organisations such as the Council for Citizenship and Service Learning have been involved in promoting the link (Annette, 2005).

It will be argued in the following that community service learning is possible to be an effective way for education for citizenship in higher education through exploring two questions: why and how service learning can be used in education for citizenship in higher education.

**Why?**

The Crick Report considers ‘whether service learning or community involvement initiated by schools should be part of a new statutory Order for citizenship education’ (QCA, 1998, sect.
5.3.2). Although higher education is not compulsory, this consideration about the importance of community service learning in citizenship education in schools still raises the possibility of introducing community service learning as a type of learning active citizens into the undergraduate curriculum in Britain. Specifically in universities, community service learning could be an effective way to fulfill not only students’ needs in learning for active citizenship but also the civic role of universities.

Firstly, in terms of students, what needs to be indicated is that students in universities normally are over eighteen-year-old, which is the beginning age of having formal political rights such as the right of vote. Unlike pupils in primary schools and secondary schools, students in universities start to involve extensively in public life and accordingly begin to change from the role of learning to the role of influencing in public life. Community service learning as a bridge is appropriate for students in universities to learn knowledge, skills and understanding for active citizenship practically in communities and develop a large and inclusive social imagination, and gradually participate and influence actively, knowledgeably and responsibly in public life. The latter one is the aim of education for citizenship.

Secondly, in terms of universities, the civic role of universities, which seems to be ignored in the development of modern universities, could be strengthened through the promotion of community service learning. Universities, as Mattson et al. (1997) consider, have a civic role in communities to ‘measure up in developing public citizens as well as private employees, in sustaining civic institutions as well as research and development institutes, in engaging in the reality of their surrounding communities as well being involved in national and global affairs’. By stressing community service learning, students become
engaged in learning and service in communities to use professional knowledge to solve community problems and acquire knowledge, skills and value of active citizen, which cannot be learned separately in universities. Students as a platform bond universities and communities, academic experts and citizens. The professional knowledge can be applied practically in communities and universities engage in communities to fulfill its civic role of contributing to communities, and accordingly communities become an abundant resource for student to learn for active citizenship.

**How?**

Based on the three strands of citizenship education defined by the Crick Report, namely social and moral responsibility, community involvement and political literacy, this part will explore how community service learning is an effective way in learning for active citizenship.

i. Social and moral responsibility

The undergraduate social and moral development is highly emphasized by Ehrlish et al. in the USA and they argue that it ‘has always been central to the goal of liberal education’ (cited from Annette, 2005, p.334). In terms of the method of this development, Annette (2005) discusses that service learning provides an experiential way of understanding moral thinking and enable students to develop their moral imagination.

Specifically, as ‘an essential political as well as moral virtue’, ‘responsibility’ implies three aspects: ‘care for others; premeditation and calculation about what effect actions are likely to have on others; and understanding and care for the consequences’ (QCA, 1998, sect. 2.12). Through community service learning, students communicate with people from
extensively social classes and realize personally the complex relations of different aspects of society. These experiences could foster students’ understanding that one’s life choices tend to be enacted in certain social contexts and students’ consciousness that individual ideas and actions have public consequences.

For example, the Wingspread Statement on Student Civic Engagement, declared by college students in 2001 and published by Campus Compact, a national organisation promoting citizenship education in higher education in the USA, shows that students do consider that learning by engaging in community can develop the consciousness of the calculation of individual actions, which have public repercussions, and experience ‘how to subordinate individual desires to a larger public purpose’ (Long et al., 2001, p.6).

ii. Community involvement

Community service learning could have the most direct link to community involvement. The emphasis of this kind of learning, engaging in community, is part of the implication of community involvement. The interpretation of community involvement in citizenship education in the Crick Report indicates the relationship between the two. The report considers that learning for community involvement is ‘learning about and becoming helpfully involved in the life and concerns of their communities, including learning through community involvement and service to the community’ (QCA, 1998, sect. 2.11).

It could be argued that through community service learning there are explicit outcomes for education for community involvement. When students embrace community service learning, they acquire an opportunity to understand the nature and the diversity of community, which are reflected and measured by the outcomes of learning. This measured understanding
becomes a basis of active and continuous participation in community in students’ life.

iii. Political literacy

Political literacy is considered as ‘a term that is wider than political knowledge alone’ and includes knowledge, skills and values that are necessary for being effective in public life (QCA, 1998, sect. 2.11). The emphasis of public life in education for political literacy implicates that these knowledge, skills and values need to be acquired and measured in practice such as through engaging in community. When students engage in community, they inevitably face challenges of solving problems and decision-making during community service. These challenges require students to learn not only realistic knowledge about the politics, economy in society but also make efforts to prepare for ‘conflict resolution and decision-making related to the main economic and social problems of the day’ (QCA, 1998, sect. 2.11).

Furthermore, it is argued by college student representatives in the USA that community service learning is ‘a form of alternative politics’, which means that ‘participation in community service can be undertaken as a form of unconventional political activity that can lead to social change’ (Long et al., 2001, p. VI). The change of college students’ role in community participation, as discussed above, from learning to influencing and changing, is the reason that education for citizenship in higher education should emphasize students’ political participation and influence as well as political literacy. A research done by Ahier et al. (2003) shows the contradiction about students’ political sense. On one hand, British university students do feel ‘a sense of distance and disengagement from “official politics” such as government politics, political parties and voting in political elections; on the other
hand, they do have ‘a strong sense of concerns about social justice and fairness’ although they rarely use the term ‘political citizenship’ for these sentiments (p. 3). In this sense, community service learning as ‘a form of alternative politics’ provides university students with a practical chance to participate in unofficial politics and to concern, influence and solve social problems.
CONCLUSION

This essay has tried to introduce community service learning as an effective type of learning in education for citizenship in higher education.

Before the introduction of community service learning, a general picture of citizenship education in higher education has been provided in section one. It has been argued that citizenship education in higher education tends to be not the focus of the current debates and development of citizenship education. The aim of citizenship education, however, to a large degree is consistent with that of higher education, although at present citizenship education seems absent from higher education. Based on this background, the reasons that citizenship education is missed in higher education have been analysed in two terms, the change of social role of higher education and the new institutional form of higher education.

In section two, community service learning has been explored through answering two questions: why and how community service learning can be used as an effective way for learning citizenship education in higher education. The fitness of introducing community service learning into higher education is discussed in three strands of citizenship education respectively.

The aim of the essay is to provide discussion. How to learn for active citizenship by community service learning needs to be tested and developed further in practice. Furthermore, although community service learning could be employed in education for citizenship in higher education, the implementation of citizenship education and community service learning in universities is still facing challenges. How to encourage the government,
educators and universities to attach importance to citizenship education in higher education?

How can citizenship education, which is interdisciplinary, fit into the dominant disciplinary undergraduate curriculum? How to facilitate, measure and standard education for citizenship by community service learning in higher education? A range of practical questions needs to be explored and debated openly by educators and universities in the future.
**REFERENCE**


