Education and Politics in the Individualized Society

Connecting by the Cultivation of Citizenship

Kayo Fujii (Yokohama National University)

Abstract

In this paper, I will consider the citizenship education of the future in the Individualized Society, while bearing in mind how politics has directed education. According to a proposal by the Science Council of Japan, the new subject, "Publics," is "citizenship education that fosters political literacy," citizenship education has taken its first steps in Japan. But, citizenship education sometimes promotes social inclusion. Social inclusion tends to expand and strengthen homogeneity and commonality, thus moving is different from the formation of a political community based on multiplicity and difference. For that reason, I will talk about citizenship education as subjectification. According to Gert Biesta, subjectification is not about maintaining the existing order, but about independence from the existing order. Subjectification has a unique relationship to politics in citizenship education. In this sense, children are already political entities, faced with the numerous worries and struggles that stem from existing with numerous layers of citizenships, and there is no one way by which problems relating to citizenship arise nor is there one way to solve them. This paper concludes that citizenship education is less of an education that seeks to form predetermined good citizens and more of an education that is headed toward a democratic experience.

Keywords

citizenship education, democratic experience, subjectification, politics, public places

Introduction

Looking back at the history of *Bildung* (education, cultivation, refinement, and character building), it can be said that it has had an educational and a political aspect (Biesta 2003). The educational aspect is the history of devising educational contents needed for fostering good character and a good internal spirit. What emerged as a part of that process

were Kant's ideas. Kant suggested a philosophy of Enlightenment from immaturity to maturity, a state where one can perceive one's own will and make decisions without being swayed by external factors. At the same time, he saw that education was needed to become such a person. The image of the mature person was "an answer to the question about the role of the subject in the emerging civil society" as well as an aspect of "political history" (Biesta 2003:62).

Kant was not the only one to envision a connection between education and politics. For example, critical pedagogy is a field of study. Having incorporated the theories of Habermas, critical pedagogy (that is, *Kritische Erziehungswissenschaft*) was conceived of and practiced in the 1960s and 1970s in Germany, critically framing the social situation of that time. In the United States as well, critical pedagogues such as Apple and Giroux inquired about social and educational issues from a political perspective, pointing out that that no knowledge is neutral. What this suggests is that the concept of education has always already contained politics.

In this paper, I will consider the citizenship education of the future, while bearing in mind how politics has directed education thus far.

1. The New Subject, "Publics"

According to a proposal by the Science Council of Japan, the new subject, "Publics," is "citizenship education that fosters political literacy" that encourages "thinking deeply about controversial issues" and "understanding what the points at issue are," centering on political literacy.[1] Active proposals have been made about what to learn and how—for example, a shift from knowledge acquisition to active learning, learning about the relationship between citizens and the state ("how citizens support the state and control the state's authority")—so it can be said that citizenship education, which teaches students how to live as citizens, has taken its first steps in Japan.

An especially interesting part of the proposal is the "quality of publicness" that citizenship education pursues. Simply put, the "quality of

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[1] Science Council of Japan (Psychology and Pedagogy Committees, Subcommittee for Thinking about High-School Civics Education from the Standpoint of Citizenship Education), *Proposal: Citizen at Age 18: High-School Civics Reform for Citizenship Cultivation*, May 2016.

publicness," which consists of the five areas of multicultural coexistence, sexual diversity and gender equality, Japan in East Asia, constitutionalism and democratic government, and elementary philosophy and ethics, can be explained as follows. Among other things, publicness is a state that embraces the diversity of people and religions; it is thinking from "a broad perspective of cultivating 'global citizens'" and not just "cultivating the nation"; it is "further opening up our national consciousness (understanding of domestic multiculturalism and diversity)" by framing Japan as part of the "East Asia region" and "relativizing the self with the perspective of the other"; it is the availability of diverse pathways of political participation on the foundation of constitutionalism and the existence of a multilayered "public" space consisting of "municipalities, prefectures, and nation"; it is "'public' space whose structure is neither singular nor simple" because "one man or woman simultaneously belongs to multiple spaces"; and it is citizen cultivation in the form of ethical subject formation.

In other words, publicness in citizenship education is highlighted from the perspectives of geography, equality, ethics, and politics, thus being framed as a complex quality woven from multiple perspectives that embrace spatial multilayeredness and the diversity of human relations, political participation, and lifestyles. Hence, publicness cannot be understood with close-mindedness or individual thinking.

2. Social Inclusion and Citizenship Education

As a matter of fact, citizenship education sometimes promotes social inclusion. According to Biesta, because European active citizenship promotes active participation in the community and is an activity for practicing "good citizenship," the image conjured up is one of citizens who do what are considered "good" deeds without reflecting on what is "good" and from what perspective (Biesta 2011).

If it is decided from the outset what is "good," then the result will be the formation of a largely steady and stable community premised on existing values. According to Lingis, such a community is a place where conversations are maintained as part of a given context and a rational community, in which individual voices are exchanged as representative of roles within that community. For example, a school becomes a place where

teachers and students speak "as a representative of the common rational discourse" (Lingis 1994:112). A different kind of community is one where nothing is shared. Such a community does not emerge from the importance of conversational contents, but from a situation in which one must say something.[2]

As a matter of course, a community of active citizenship is not one where nothing is shared. Active participation in a community based on specific values is premised not only on simply being citizens, but on the common goal of being "good citizens." Participation in such a community gives rise to an inside and an outside of the community and tends to expand and strengthen homogeneity and commonality, thus moving in a direction different from the formation of a political community based on multiplicity and difference.

Moreover, how we understand political literacy becomes important when we talk about citizenship education. If we were to understand political literacy as something individual, that is, specific knowledge or skills to be acquired by individuals, then this would mean that democracy is sustained and created by the skills of individuals. Citizenship education teaches students how to live with others, so is individual skill acquisition enough?

3. Citizenship Education as Subjectification

The aforementioned Biesta observed that education, while partially overlapping, fulfills the three different functions of qualification, socialization, and subjectification, arguing that education is not simply the acquisition of skills by individuals.[3] In the case of citizenship education, qualification is about providing citizens with important knowledge and skills. Socialization is about fitting individuals in "existing ways of doing and being" (Biesta 2010:20) and is deeply connected with maintaining existing

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[2] Lingis's theory on community categorizes based on differences in communication quality. "There are then two entries into communication—the one by which one depersonalizes one's visions and insights, formulates them in the terms of the common rational discourse, and speaks as a representative, a spokesperson, equivalent and interchangeable with others, of what has to be said. The other entry into communication is that in which you find it is you, you saying something, that is essential" (Lingis 1994:116).

[3] This division is a theoretical division to clarify "the different functions of education and the different potential purposes of education" (Biesta 2010:21). As such, the three educational functions are not independent, but exist in a multilayered relationship.

order. For example, schools have pulled newcomers into the community through specific forms of cultural transmission. Subjectification is not about maintaining the existing order, but about "independence from such orders" (Biesta 2010:21). In this sense, subjectification has a unique relationship to politics in citizenship education.

The concept of subjectification is a notion conceived of from the fact that students can learn things that are unknown to the teacher. According to Rancière, the educational relationship of the student learning what the teacher explains is one intelligence subjecting another intelligence, and it is a relationship that advances "stultification" (Rancière 1991:13). This educational relationship is dependent on the division between the teacher and the learner, so that "those excluded from the world of intelligence themselves subscribe to the verdict of their exclusion" (Rancière 1991:16). As such, any education premised on a separation of learners and teachers by there being "an inferior intelligence and a superior one" (Rancière 1991:7) must be criticized, allowing us to conceive of an education based on intelligence equality in which the manifestation of intelligence is unequal, "but there is no hierarchy of intellectual capacity" (Rancière 1991:27). In other words, subjectification signifies liberation from hierarchical education that subjects the student's intelligence to that of the teacher. Subjectifying education reframes the student from being a "good citizen" to an "ignorant citizen" (Biesta 2011:97) released from the intellectual hierarchy, thus building up a politics of intelligence equality.[4]

Citizenship education as intelligence equality is not a process of continuously acquiring the knowledge of the teacher. If socialization is future-oriented learning (preparation for entering society)—learning to become a citizen—then subjectification is learning that stems from the irregularity of experiences in the present—learning to be a citizen.

Adults and children alike are born into diverse citizenships, being citizens of Earth, East Asia, a prefecture, a city, a town, etc., and live life with multiple citizenships at the same time. As such, children are already political entities, faced with the numerous worries and struggles that stem

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[4] In an interview, Rancière was asked whether democracy is neither a form of government nor a form of society, but something like an ideal beyond reach or a critical tool, something akin to a drop hammer for debates, to which he replied that, "No, it's not an ideal, because I always follow the principle of Jacotot that equality is a presupposition, not a goal to be attained" (Rancière 2011:78).

from existing with numerous layers of citizenships, and there is no one way by which problems relating to citizenship arise nor is there one way to solve them. Citizenship education, which throws this diversity of life into relief, acts as a bridge between being a citizen and becoming a citizen, repeatedly revealing life as a citizen as the base of human life.

Furthermore, subjectification does not refer to Kant's autonomous subject, which has been central to conventional pedagogy. The reason for this is that, although the Kantian subject very much is character-building oriented toward freedom, it "seems to be unable to be open to the possibility that newcomers might radically alter our understandings of what it means to be human " (Biesta 2010:79-80), owing to how it limits the meaning of being human. In other words, citizenship education as subjectification is ever expanding educational horizons driven by an "interest in human freedom" (Biesta 2010:75), even when education is carried out with a focus on qualification and socialization.

4. An Education Theory without Teaching

Subjectification is the appearance of individuality that cannot be contained in the existing order or, put differently, the appearance of unique individuals within a world of multiplicity. This uniqueness stems from "interruptions" to regular continuous education caused by human action, meaning that it cannot be defined as a result of education. In this sense, the notion of subjectification is something that cannot be taught, an educational notion that originates from process.

We already saw how the creation of a community is the same as the appearance of uniqueness. A community with nothing shared is not formed as a result of education, but comes into being when a rational community is interrupted (Biesta 2010:90). It appears when continuous educational actions are interrupted, such as when those educational actions are obstructed by noise or when one is not deprived of the chance to encounter one's own voice within those educational actions. Similarly, the appearance of a community with nothing shared is also something that cannot be planned in education. In other words, the coupling of freedom and citizenship education suggests a notion of sporadic education. It is education that is incidental to regular educational actions and something that might happen anywhere. If so,

is the citizenship education of the future something that forges ahead with socializing and qualifying education while always latently containing subjectification, only to have it appear unexpectedly and sporadically?

5. Education and Politics in the Age of Individualization

Now, I would like to consider the place where subjectifying learning takes place. Biesta says that subjectifying learning happens in "public places." Public places refer to places where private voices shift to concerns greater than individual summation. They are places where democracy is practiced.

According to Bauman, public places are nothing more than "a giant screen on which private worries are projected" (Bauman 2000:39) that are beginning to disappear in our modern age of individualization as the public spaces have become incapable of functioning as places where private worries and public problems meet and enter dialogue. In order to energize the hollowed-out public places, we need to stimulate citizenship education in the form of citizenship cultivation, and in order to stimulate citizenship education, we need to revive the public places. To achieve this, we must practice learning based on intelligence equality as well as engage in debate in a broad sense, conversing, debating, and negotiating with children as ignorant citizens. The reason for this is that democracy always contains the potential for innovation by heterogeneous voices and is maintained by constantly devising pathways that connect the public with the problems that arise from the lives of fluid individuals that can be framed as neither minorities nor the majority, without doing away with them as individual issues.

Conclusion

Citizenship education is less of an education that seeks to form predetermined good citizens and more of an education that is headed toward a better democratic experience. Better democracy does not emerge from practice converging on a single order, but from practice that redraws the borders of a new order directed toward freedom and equality.

Discourses at school always contain the potential for drawing new borders. At the same time, they also have the potential to operate to qualify

students through the acquisition of debating skills and to socialize them to enter debating groups. Citizenship education that is directed toward freedom and equality will have to explore how to continue the discourse when no mediation is possible.

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