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The Identities Of Catalan And English Secondary Students

This proposal is based on empirical work undertaken in England and Catalonia at a time when issues of national, European and other identities were prominently discussed in the media and elsewhere and when a new curriculum was introduced to both locations.

Identity can be defined as the symbolic relationship between the individual and the social environment (Chrysochoou, 2003). This social environment could be understood as the concept of community, about which there are competing discourses (Davies, Hampden-Thompson, Calhoun, Bramley, Tsouroufli, Sundaram, Lord & Jeffes, 2013). Anderson (1983) argues that, 'all communities larger than primordial villages of face-to-face contact (and perhaps even these) are imagined' (p.6). Indeed, it could be suggested that identity is a symbolic relationship with other individuals who share a similar imaginary position regarding a community.

The links between identity and citizenship education are strong and complex. Citizenship is here defined through a dialectical process which involves an objective and usually legal identity which is assigned by an external entity as well as an identity which is subjectively assumed (Berger & Lukman, 1986; Kymlicka & Norman, 1994). The creation and reinforcement of national identities has traditionally been identified as a principal purpose of schooling (Lave & Wegner, 1998) in which Citizenship Education plays an outstanding role (Osler & Starkey, 2003; Olssen, 2004; Misiejuk, Rubik & Tutiaux-Guillon, 2004; Torres & Esteban, 2005; Ross, 2007). Beyond national-state identity, in a considerable number of countries, national curricula have also been seen as generating European identity (Delanty, 2007), regional identity (Oller, 2013) or school identity (Osler & Starkey, 2003). It has been argued that rather than talking about a singular identity, it is more appropriate in this complex field to think about the concept of identities (Kymlicka, 1995; Osler & Starkey, 2003) or multiple identities (Ross, 2007). There is little agreement as to whether identities are partially in flux, are unchanging or whether there is a dominant pattern of identity formation and expression. It has been argued that the process of temporary identities is particularly relevant in childhood and adolescence where young people, in school contexts, constantly create categories for groups of their peers who become the other (Ross, 2007).

The relationship between 'citizenship' and 'identity' is strongly contested in both England and Catalonia (Delanty, 2014). The complex histories (which have involved violent struggles within what are currently constituted as national states), relationships with others (including the transnational citizenship of the European Union), demographic diversity and other factors have through such events and processes as the September 2014 Referendum on Scottish Independence highlighted tensions about identity. We wished to undertake empirical research with young people in contexts in which questions have been posed about the very existence of the United Kingdom and England's place within it; where issues about separatism from the national state have been the source and expression of struggle in Catalonia; and where European citizenship has had a contested nature both, in terms of legal status and identity. We feel that the similarities but also the differences between England and Catalonia might be helpful to illuminate and to gain a deeper understanding about each of them. In particular we gathered and analysed data in order to address three key research questions:

- What are the similarities and differences in the ways English/Catalan students identify themselves with communities/groups?
- What are the similarities and differences in the ways English/Catalan students identify themselves as citizens?
- To what extent and how do English/Catalan schools contribute to reinforcing students' self-identification?

Method

Given that our main aim was wide ranging, we felt that a mixed methods approach would be appropriate (e.g. Johnson et al 2007; Bergman, 2008). Data were collected in England during November 2012 - January 2013 and in Catalonia between March 2014 and April 2014 with

simultaneous analysis during April - August 2014. The 3 English and 6 Catalan schools that were invited to join the project were known for their expertise and commitment to citizenship education. In each school, citizenship or social studies teachers were requested to survey students aged 13-15.

583 students supplied data for this research. The mean age of the students was 13,9 and the ratio boys/girls was 1/1.17. 32 of the total sample of 583 students participated in focus-group interviews. Eight focus-group interviews were carried out (4 in Catalonia and 4 in England). In all cases, teachers selected the students according to the 3 criteria of students' willingness to participate and debate; a range of academic ability; and gender. The focus groups were equally divided between boys and girls (except, one of the English schools was a girls' school). A questionnaire survey was used. Students were asked about their perceptions about identity and citizenship. In the semi-structured focus-groups students were encouraged to discuss the relationship between their perception of citizenship and the groups they felt they belong into and the importance of having a sense of belonging. Initial qualitative analysis (Creswell, 1998; Miles and Huberman, 1994) was completed. English and Catalan data were analysed simultaneously. Initial categories were developed followed by codification and re-codification and creation of matrix nets and schemes with subsequent testing of those analyses. Once qualitative data had been codified using this procedure, data from the surveys were quantified. Using the process of quantification called 1 (Present) versus 0 (absent) (Sandelowski, 2009), new variables were created. Data was compared using contingency tables. We then triangulated the results from the quantitative analyses of survey and the results from the qualitative analyses of both the survey questionnaire and focus group data. The quantitative analysis was used to highlight the differences and similarities between both groups, and qualitative analyses were used to explain these differences and similarities of students' perceptions.

Expected Outcomes

Our results suggest that English students tend to identify themselves with more groups of people than Catalan students do. Whereas English students identify themselves more frequently with religion, places, gender and friendship groups, Catalan students identify themselves with Catalan independence supporters, with age and with the group of 'the students'. English students seem to identify themselves more frequently with people from a mix of different places, gender and religion. For the English students, the sense of belonging is acquired by sharing time, hobbies and activities. For Catalan students, belonging is based principally around the intrinsic nature of each person in terms of feeling a certain identity, liking a common element of the group, speaking a particular language or simply by 'being'. When asked about their citizenship, most students (88,0%) consider themselves to be citizens. A higher percentage of English students perceive themselves as British (15,5%) in contrast with the percentage of Catalan students perceiving themselves as Spanish (4,4%). There are extremely few indications of any sense of European or world citizenship (0,3%). Both English and Catalan students mentioned the importance for citizenship of feeling that there are some similarities with the other citizens from the same community. However, whereas the English respondents place more emphasis on a feeling of belonging, the Catalans rely more strongly on a legal status, rights and duties. We conclude that neither the English students, who assert their 'multiple identities', nor the Catalan students, who have more exclusive forms of identities, seem to have any strong feelings of European belonging. In addition, their views seem to suggest that the new curricula recently introduced into the two countries will not be welcomed. We suggest that further work is needed to explore the disconnection between young people's views and European and national policies to citizenship education and identity.

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