Reconciling the Civic, the Sacred and the Just in Critical-Pragmatic Education

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Abstract

In our presentation we will first outline our core concern, that is the importance of intertwining the three forms of education: citizenship education, worldview education, and human rights education. Then we will, secondly, position our transformative view within a critical-pragmatic pedagogy with the aim of our pedagogical, as well political program to strengthen the potentialities for social engagement, solidarity, encounter and dialogue and to tackle the dangers of religions and worldviews, of reduced citizenship education, as well as the neglect of human rights education within the setting of the schools. And finally we will reflect on the impact of this for the state and for schools when the just, the civic, and the sacred are to be reconciled in citizenship education, wordview education and human rights education.

The intertwinement of three forms of education

During the first decade of the 21st century the Council of Europe has given a strong impetus to paying attention to democratic citizenship education in the member states. This has steadily be done in relationship to (inter)religious education combined with intercultural education. The aim for this pedagogical, educational, as well political program was to strengthen the potentialities and to tackle the dangers of religions and worldviews within the setting of the schools (see Jackson, Miedema, Weisse & Willaime, 2007).

Already in 1993 the *World Conference on Human Rights* in Vienna called on states to include human rights, democracy, and the rule of law as subjects in the curricula of all learning institutions in formal and non-formal education. In 2005 the European Ministers responsible for youth called in Budapest for a framework policy document, that is an international instrument on education for democratic citizenship and human rights education. However, the importance of the relationship of and the distinction between education for democratic citizenship and human rights education was only put on the agenda of the Council of Europe in 2010. A *Charter* was adopted by the Ministers on May 11 2010, and further elaboration took place in October two years ago by publishing the booklet *Council of Europe Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education* (C of E, 2010).

It is highly interesting to compare this rather late start in Europe with the attention paid to human rights education in South Africa that started immediately after the abolishment of the Apartheids regime in 1994. The need to pay explicit attention there and then to democratic education, human rights education and a new awareness of how religion or worldview could be addressed without any preference for the Christian tradition, has positioned South African pedagogues including religious educators at the international forefront of the debate on human rights education (see extensively Roux, 2012).

It is our contention that the plea in the 2010 *Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education* for the relationship of education for democratic citizenship and

human rights education, is an open invitation to schools to embody in their own practices - thus in pedagogical relations and situations, in classrooms setting and at the level of the school - democratic principles and human rights. One of the reasons for our contention, also fully in line with what is stated in the *Charter*, is that it should not simply be done in the form of imparting knowledge (teaching and learning about), but also of developing skills, and influencing attitudes with a view to encouraging active participation and in defense of human rights (see C of E 2010, p. 30). Thus schools - being embryonic societies - should embody and practice themselves the constituent elements of real participative and deliberative democracies. We are greatly inspired here by the train of thought of the philosopher and pedagogue John Dewey on democracy and education (cf. Dewey, 1897/1972; 1916; 1927).

Following and further elaborating along Dewey's pragmatist view, it is, pedagogically speaking and from a societal and political perspective desirable that students already in the embryonic society of the school, experience or are confronted by and should become acquainted with the other students' religious or worldview, cultural, ethnic, economical backgrounds, ideas, experiences, practices, situations, and contexts. Seen the impact of religious/worldview, and the influence of the political, cultural and economical domains locally and globally, they can also benefit from such experiences and insights when they encounter religious/worldview, cultural, ethnic and political 'others' in society at large, and around the globe. However, the school has its own place here *sui generis*. So, from a societal as well as pedagogical point of view, all schools should be willing - and in our opinion should be obliged - to aim for fostering democratic citizenship education, interreligious or inter-worldview education, and human rights education. Thereby bringing about mutual respect and understanding and stimulating the development of democratic citizenship formation, religious (worldview) citizenship formation, and human rights formation (cf. Miedema, 2006). Attention should especially be paid to the human rights education in this triadic aim setting, that is the empowerment of the students as speakers to be able "to contribute to the building and defense of a universal culture of human rights in society and globally, with a view to the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms (see C of E 2010, p. 7).

Regarding religious education we prefer to use the concept 'worldview' with 'religion' as a sub-concept of it, and define it as the system, which is always subjected to changes, of implicit and explicit views and feelings of an individual in relation to human life. 'Views and feelings in relation to human life' can refer to everything with which people can be occupied with and what can be important to them. In empirical research with students we use a short 'stipulative definition' namely: "*A worldview is the way one looks at life*" (Bertram-Troost, De Roos & Miedema 2006). Using the concept of 'worldview' may help to avoid absolute secularist approaches against religion, thus wanting to leave religious education out of the curriculum of the school completely. However, everyone has at least a personal worldview which is sometimes but not always directly influenced by an organized worldview, and this should be pedagogically taken into account as we have claimed elsewhere (see Van der Kooij, De Ruyter & Miedema, 2013). The concept 'worldview' can also prevent absolute exclusivist approaches leading for example to a preferential argumentation in paying attention to only one religion and not to other religions or/and worldviews, not even in the teaching about variant. Both the absolute secularist and the absolute exclusivist religious stance can be interpreted as colonizing claims against for instance the universal claim in human rights of self-development and self-appropriation of children and young people. A thick conception of worldview includes teaching and learning about and from worldviews, and this in contrast with a thin conception which is just teaching and learning about worldviews.

What might be really helpful to strengthen the three partite intertwinement is the concept of *'maximal citizenship education'* as outlined by the late Terrence McLaughlin in contrast to 'minimal citizenship education' (see McLaughlin, 1992). McLaughlin interpreted these distinctions in terms of contrasting interpretations on the continuum of the very concept of 'democratic citizenship'. It was his aim "to offer a substantial notion of 'education for citizenship' in the context of the diversity of a pluralistic democratic society", a notion "…'thick' or substantial enough *to satisfy the communal demands of citizenship, yet compatible with liberal demands concerning the development of critical rationality by citizens and satisfaction of the demands of justice relating to diversity*" (McLaughlin, 1992, 235, italics SM & GBT). Such a society, according to McLaughlin, should seek to find a balance between social and cultural diversity with cohesion. His elaboration on a minimal and maximal approach runs as follows. *In the minimal approach on citizenship education*, the subject is presented in a purely knowledge-based way, and with a particular civics-related content to be transmitted in a formal and didactic manner. The identity conferred on an individual in this conception of citizenship is merely seen in formal, legal and juridical terms. In schools, the development of the students' broad critical reflection and understanding is not stimulated nor fostered. *A maximal approach on citizenship education,* in contrast, is characterized by an emphasis on active learning and inclusion, is interactive, values-based and process led, allowing students to develop and articulate their own opinions and to engage in debate, dialogue and encounter. The individual's identity, individuation or subjectification, in this constructivist conception is dynamic instead of static, and a matter for continuing debate and redefinition. Maximal citizenship education "requires a considerable degree of explicit understanding of democratic principles, values and procedures on the part of the citizen, together with the dispositions and capacities required for participation in democratic citizenship generously conceived" (McLaughlin, 1992, 237), so in the school and in the society at large.

Elsewhere we have shown (see Miedema & Ter Avest, 2011) that the concept of maximal citizenship education offers the possibility to include religious education*,* or more adequately speaking worldview education*,* as part of such an educational program, and that it makes it even fuller in combining democratic education for citizenship and worldview education in schools. This combination can adequately be coined as 'worldview citizenship education'. This is fully combinable with what has been claimed elsewhere to be the aim of education in schools for a transformative pedagogy, that is that every child and youngster in every school should be able to develop her or his personal identity or personhood (Wardekker & Miedema, 2001), of course from a combined individual and collective perspective. It is our contention that the emphasis McLaughlin is given in his maximal definition on the *"satisfaction of the demands of justice relating to diversity"* offers precisely another possibility, namely to include human rights education as part of such an educational program. And this could be broadened to fairness, care and critique, as well as emphasizing the action or praxis side of it. Conceptually speaking the triangle of the three forms of education in interrelationship is then complete.

Critical-pragmatic pedagogy

The core concept of critical pedagogy is emancipation: every human being and hence every child must be given the possibility by way of analysis, criticism, and self-reflection to develop into a freely self-determining and rationally acting person (Miedema, 1987). These possibilities for self-determination must not be limited by material power, ideologies, or

prejudice. Several definitions of emancipation have been given. Emancipation in child raising is the process by which young people are liberated from the conditions which restrict their autonomy and competence in self-reflection (Mollenhauer, 1977). Emancipation is the process of setting people free from the compulsion of material power, as well as from ideologies and prejudices with the help of analysis, critique, and self-reflection (Lempert, 1969). At the individual level, child raising is aimed at self-reliance, self-responsibility, and self- and codetermination. Socially it is directed at sociability and solidarity (Klafki, 1970, p. 26; 1982, pp. 19-20).

The concept of emancipation provides an anthropological model that is both dynamic and formal. Strikingly, even at its core concept of emancipation, critical pedagogy remains formally theoretical. In that respect it closely resembles the critical theory of Habermas who inspired it. Habermas with his theory of knowledge-leading interests, complemented later with the concepts of communicative competence, offers a justification for, but not a theory of, emancipation (Habermas, 1970; 1971; 1984). At a theoretical level Habermas legitimizes the emancipation of, for example, black persons and women, but did not tell us or them what should be done in reaching that emancipation. One of the consequences is that child raising, when described as emancipation, also results in a formal concept of child raising.

The pedagogical challenge of this formal character of emancipation is the following one: the concept of child raising in critical pedagogy does not allow for any prior substantial filling-in because, according to critical pedagogues, the particular content of the concept must be determined separately for every historical-social situation. The economic, social, and political aspects of a context have to be taken into account and only on that basis can there be an adequate filling-in. And it is here that the pragmatist tradition is a fruitful partner for the critical tradition because the emphasis is on pedagogical action regarding the practical needs and problems that are felt in a particular societies and cultures and the practical experiences and reflective processes in these 'associations' as Dewey names them (Dewey, 1916; 1927). So, taken these circumstances into account, the practical pedagogical question that need to be answered is what particular and contextual situated kinds of pedagogical relations and situations should be arranged in order to make the emancipation of the students, their individuation flourish. The answer to this question is not to be given in advance nor on a general level. However, theoretically speaking it is clear that the aim for a transformative oriented critical-pragmatic pedagogy is to strengthen the potentialities for social engagement, solidarity, encounter and dialogue and to tackle the dangers of religions or worldviews, of reduced citizenship education, as well as the neglect of human rights education within the setting of the schools.

The impact on schools

It is widely recognized that in liberal-democratic societies citizenship education is the responsibility in terms of educational policy of each country's government. And if a government should take the responsibility for an inclusive concept of citizenship education seriously, it should mean that without any preference *per se* at the side of the government itself for a particular worldview or religion, each government could take what we characterize as the *political-pedagogical responsibility* to stimulate the policy of and practice in schools to foster religious or worldview education as part of an integral citizenship education (see Miedema & Bertram-Troost, 2008). But following the argumentation just given, we also want to add to this political-pedagogical responsibility, the responsibility for human rights education as an integral part to that. This should imply that the state should feel obliged to stimulate in the schools the building and defense of a universal culture of human rights in

society and globally, with a view to the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms in a contextualized way.

Stressing the universality of human rights and children's rights is an ongoing need in the Netherlands where from right wing parties but also from liberal democrats and Christian democrats one is time and again trying to particularize - or in our view even to provincialize or to nationalize - the interpretation of human and children's' rights. Here we have the tension between universality on a national and local level versus particularity. Or to put it differently the tension is here between thick constitutionalism including transnational focus on human rights and especially the position of the individual versus thin constitutionalism with a national focus on the national context, particularly in terms of heritage and culture, and a tense relationship with human rights.

Speaking of the *political-pedagogical responsibility* of the state, there is also the flipside of this with a task for the schools: which we like to coin as their *pedagogical-political responsibility*. Taking the case of the Netherlands as an example we need to conclude that till now not all schools have seriously taken up their pedagogical-political responsibility that is the obligation to give form and content to citizenship education in the sense we have outlined, although this is obliged by law since February 2006 for both primary and secondary schools (see Dijkstra, 2012; Onderwijsraad, 2012). Nor are they fully aware of the urgent need to foster the worldview identity of their students. This especially holds for a lot of state schools, although our pedagogical colleagues from the *University of Humanistics* in Utrecht, are also strongly trying to convince them of this necessity and also support them in this.

Seen their pedagogical-political responsibility it is also remarkable that the issue of Human Rights Education has hardly be given any attention up till now in the Netherlands in educational settings. We, however, interpret the changed context after the murder respectively of Pim Fortuyn (2002) and of Theo van Gogh (2004) and the impact of the strong polarizing political and societal rhetoric of Geert Wilders and his one-member party as well as the impact of neo-liberal thought in other parties as well, as signals for the urgent need of human rights education in schools with an eye on justice, fairness, as well care and critique. The change, that is more negative attitudes towards tolerance, equality, equity, justice and care in the Netherlands are outcomes of loaded debates on the conflicting issues of diversity, immigration, national identity, duties and rights for incomers.

These issues are of course strongly connected to human rights education, but also to democratic citizenship education and worldview education in both state and denominational schools. A lot of theoretical, pedagogical practical and political work need to be done here to intertwine the civic, the sacred and the just in schools. And surely not only in the Netherlands. As stated earlier, we can learn a lot here from the insights and experiences of our South African colleagues. It is our view, that the transformative perspective within a critical-pragmatic pedagogy is of help here both in theory and in practice in respect to the aim of our pedagogical as well political program to strengthen the potentialities for social engagement, solidarity, encounter and dialogue at the side of the students. Let the school bells ring!

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