Towards a cosmopolitan orientation in the classroom?
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An outline to a paper – not to be quoted

Introduction

Is it possible to develop a next step in research juxtaposing “curriculum as cosmopolitan inheritance with recent curriculum inquiry on educating the human capacity for critical dialogue and deliberation”, David Hansen (2008) asks and clarifies: “Can the willingness and the skills to deliberate critically across difference be conceived as an ongoing world inheritance?” (Hansen 2008 p. 307). If we interpret deliberation / deliberative communication “as an endeavour to ensure that each individual takes a stand by listening, deliberating, seeking arguments and evaluating, while at the same time there is a collective effort to find values and norms on which everyone can agree” (cf. Englund 2006 p. 505), we can make an attempt to elaborate and analyse the preconditions for what we could call a cosmopolitan orientation.

In trying to elaborate and analyse the preconditions for such a development I will reiterate some parts from my earlier contribution on the cosmopolitan project, “The potential of education for creating mutual trust. Schools as sites for deliberation” (Englund 2011), in which I develop the idea of schools as possible encounters between cultures. I will then develop some thoughts on that ground making children’s right to a pluralistic education central. Thus, I will argue for the need of a public education system, where the right of each child to a pluralistic education is a kind of ground for cosmopolitanism. By taking these steps I will be questioning the parental right to educational authority¹, which I mean is an important obstacle for the development each child’s entrance into a cosmopolitan orientation.²

¹ Here I will use and refer to an article where this questioning is more elaborated (Englund 2010).

² I am not here going into the fast growing literature on the different meanings of cosmopolitanism as a concept, but I have been inspired, besides Hansen (2011), mainly by Nussbaum (1996); Appiah (2006), Held (2010), Todd (2009) and Waks (2008) in setting up what I call ‘a cosmopolitan orientation’.
Thus, there seems, in my view, to exist a specific field of force between the right of each child (to a pluralistic education) and the parental right to educational authority. This field of force is embedded in the liberal tradition and in many other cultural traditions as well. This field of force is also built into the international conventions, at the same time as these conventions are becoming more and more important as underlying principles for the activities within schools in many countries. In the last step of the paper I will argue for schools as sites for deliberation between cultures and deliberative communication as central to a cosmopolitan orientation or shall we say, one aspect of what schools can do to promote cosmopolitanism. In line with Erman (2009) I understand deliberation as constitutive of conflict, i.e. starting from different, struggling views of anything. This also opens up the ongoing discussion between deliberation and agonism and on which one of these perspectives is the most adequate model for promoting pluralism, a sense of community and students’ judgment abilities, aspects which will be touched upon later on. I will also stress that it is my view that the educational system will be less able to fulfil the deliberative activities if schools continue to be more and more segregated and based on the parental right to educational authority.

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**Schools as encounters between cultures**

In Englund (2011) I did put the question if it is possible to look at schools as spaces for encounters? Could schools contribute to a deliberative mode of communication in a manner better suited to our own time and to areas where different cultures meet? Inspired primarily by classical (Dewey) and modern

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3 Here I will make use of another, earlier written article, Englund (2010) and other results from the project “Education as a citizenship right – parents’ rights, children’s rights or …...” financed by the Swedish Research Council.

(Habermas) pragmatists, I turned to Seyla Benhabib, posing the question whether she supports the proposition that schools can be sites for deliberative communication. In her *Claims of Culture* (2002), Benhabib defends the universalist deliberative democracy model and balances it against demands for a legal pluralism that would countenance a coexistence of jurisdictional systems for different cultural and religious traditions and accept varieties of institutional design for societies with strong ethnic, cultural and linguistic cleavages. She argues that there are three normative conditions of universalist deliberative democracy which these pluralist structures cannot violate: egalitarian reciprocity, voluntary self-ascription and freedom of exit and association.

In Englund (2011) I argued that a school that engages in deliberative communication, with its stress on mutual communication between different moral perspectives, gives universalism a procedurally oriented meaning, serving as an arena for encounters that represents a weak public sphere. An interactive universalism of this kind attaches importance to developing an ability and willingness to reason on the basis of the views of others and to change perspectives. In that respect, the institutional arrangements of schools are potential parts of the political dimension of cosmopolitanism, as well as its moral dimension, in terms of the obligations and responsibilities we develop through our institutions and in our actions as human beings towards one another.’

I ended up the article mentioned (Englund 2011) with a critical discussion of the works of Seyla Benhabib in saying that throughout her work, in line with her interactive universalism, she develops the need for ‘intercultural dialogue’ (2002, p. 127). But as I read her, she does not propose that there should be such a demand on schools, or that schools should have a role in intercultural dialogue in line with her own idea that in schools we ‘have to learn to live with the otherness of others whose ways of being may be deeply threatening to our own. How else can moral and political learning take place, except through such encounters ...’ (Benhabib, 2002, p. 130). On the contrary, her view of schools is rather traditional, in the sense that she sees their role in terms of first transmitting knowledge, and that this transmission
can go on even in schools which are strictly culturally based. She underlines the use of ‘standardized tests and finishing exams’ and she also writes that specific communities ‘do have a right to transmit to their children the fundamentals of their own ways of life alongside other forms of knowledge shared with humankind’ (Benhabib, 2002, pp. 124–125). To sum up, I found the views of Benhabib a bit contradictory, when on the one hand (and based in a thorough analysis of cultures not as definitive entities, but as having porous boundaries), she underlines our need ‘to learn to live with the otherness of others whose ways of being may be deeply threatening to our own’, while on the other hand she supports the right of different cultural groups ‘to transmit to their children the fundamentals of their own ways of life’. What about the importance of voluntary self-ascription and freedom of exit if the whole institutionalized socialization process is in the hands of different cultural groups? Is there not rather an obvious risk that schools working in that way will create high social capital, but low tolerance (cf. Putnam, 2000, p. 355), where ‘tolerance and trust of members within the community does not necessarily mean tolerance of outsiders, sometimes just the opposite’ (Norris, 2002, p. 143)? A possible interpretation of Benhabib’s emphasis on ‘learn[ing] to live with the otherness of others’ would rather, I suggest, be to create schools as spaces for encounters between different cultures simultaneously understanding cultures not as definitive entities, but as having porous boundaries. I believe that this might give children / each child real ‘voluntary self-ascription and freedom of exit’. This, in turn, demands the development of two different kinds of preconditions for a cosmopolitan orientation: 1) an interpretation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child that put specific limits on the parental right to authority on educational issues implying pluralism in education, and 2) room for activities like deliberative communication in schools that promote pluralism.

**On children’s rights to pluralism in education**

Consequently, I mean that Benhabib forgets her thesis on interactive universalism as an expression of pluralism when it comes to the concrete
organization of schools and that rather “a more public conception of school, in which children from many backgrounds learn together is needed because it is so hard for students to learn to be mutually tolerant and respectful of other people, traditions, and ways of life unless they are actually exposed to them… tolerance and mutual respect for others can best be acquired only by interacting with others in a setting that is itself challenging, heterogeneous, and mutually respectful” (Levinson 1999, p. 114).

From the perspective outlined it is interesting to notice the move made by Eamon Callan from his standpoint 1997 opening for another one in 2006. In his Creating Citizens 1997 he writes that “the state must give parents substantial latitude to instill in their children whatever religious faith or conception if the good they espouse. Similarly, the state must permit communities of like-minded citizens to create educational institutions that reflect their distinct way of life, even if that entails some alienation from the political culture of the larger society” (Callan 1997, p. 9). In 2006, stressing the view of education as a citizenship right for each child in light of the situation, where “some people want to deny their own children particular educational opportunities or experiences that are widely regarded as necessary to the good of every individual child” (Callan 2006 p. 262) he is referring back to the classic US Supreme court decision on Wisconsin v Yoder and William Galstons (2002) two dilemmas and defence of parental right to educational authority. Here Callan develops two models, one that he calls collective and one individual, differentiating between “what is good for children individually rather than what is needed to sustain liberal democratic norms across generations” (Callan 2006 p 267).

Furthering this distinction, Josh Corngold (2011) argues that if our primary concern is the kind of education that is needed for the flourishing of democratic society – Callan’s collective model – then “we need not be overly worried that a group of children from ‘a tiny and politically passive religious sect’ in Wisconsin doesn’t receive a tenth grade education” (Corngold 2011 p. 72 with reference to Callan 2006 p. 268). “However, if our primary concern is the kind of education that is needed for the flourishing of individual lives, then we should be much more worried about
the kind of education that Amish children are receiving, and about the potential impact of the exemption of those children” (Corngold 2011 p. 72).

Consequently, taking every child’s right to a pluralist education as a primary concern for a cosmopolitan orientation we will be worried over all kinds of indoctrination in schools, segregation by schools and the permissiveness to groups of parents’ demands of authority to an education of ‘their own’ which in my view will be crucial obstacles to develop a cosmopolitan orientation. In the next section I will consider and question three different ways in which the parental right to educational authority has been legitimized.

**Ways of legitimising the parental right to educational authority**

*The liberal tradition*

The parental right to educational authority has a long liberal tradition (cf. Gutmann’s 1987, second, *state of families* model). Classical liberalism, as represented by John Locke, in many ways provides a firm basis for the kind of possessive individualism we are seeing once again today. The parental right is, according to Locke, a natural one and in many respects it seems as if this kind of thinking is strong today when it comes to parents’ rights to educational authority as well. There is also a more interventionist liberal tradition, beginning with John Stuart Mill (cf. the third model, the *state of individuals*, developed by Gutmann) and passing via Dewey to certain representatives of contemporary liberalist thinking such as Rawls, Habermas and Gutmann. During the 20th century, this tradition – and in Western Europe, together with social democratic forces – in many ways provided Western democratic states with a more active educational role and also provided a rationale that has enabled schools, in some regards, to go beyond the authority of parents. This model of an almost universal (though that term can of course be questioned) public education system has always entailed problems, and its spokesmen have even hesitated to articulate a defence for the different models of a common, comprehensive school in recent decades.
Thus, in many ways educational authority is reverting to the view of classical liberalism, emphasising and strengthening parental rights to educational authority, a view that has been revitalised in the last few decades. The most important implication of the (reduced) scope of the (public) education system to foster democracy (as an expression of education as a social right), arising from this revitalisation of parents’ civil rights to education or the parental right to educational authority, is as I see it, a new situation. In this situation, it becomes possible and also legitimate for parents who might not have any interest in schools and schooling for democracy or in schools as encounters between different groups and cultures to distance themselves from such efforts on the part of the public education system (cf. Gutmann) and perhaps, in the long run, also from each individual’s responsibility for democracy and cosmopolitanism.

At the same time, ‘we’ in Western societies tend to question the patriarchal role of parents in other cultures, e.g. Muslim culture where parental rights seem strong and the role and autonomy played by the sexes differ. But we liberals do not question our own patriarchalism and I do not think that we can insist on other cultures giving up their strong parental influence if we are not ready to do so ourselves, and it does not seem that we are

*The role of international conventions*

The classical liberal claim of a parental right to educational authority is in no way at odds with the doctrines laid down in international agreements after the Second World War. In Article 26(3) of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted by the United Nations in 1948, it is said that “parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children”. This paragraph was originally written mainly in relation to the Nazi experience and a state that had acted undemocratically, but this paragraph has also been a crucial factor in legitimising the parental right to educational authority and, consequently, the establishment of independent schools of various kinds (cf. Roth 2009).
The European Convention, which became even more important than the Universal Declaration of Rights in that it formed the basis for a common jurisdiction, was drawn up between 1949 and 1952. In some ways it followed the same pattern of the threat of a totalitarian state, but at the same time it was more clearly related to parents’ rights to decide on the religious education of their children (cf. Wahlström 2009).

One might think that the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), drawn up in the 1980s, would have changed the situation in favour of children, but it did not. Some commentators stress that the CRC recognises the autonomy of the child, the importance of the child’s right to express his or her opinions and to be heard, and the need to listen to the child and consider his or her view, but the parental right was not really questioned and one might even say that the convention to some extent revitalised the civil parental right to ownership of one’s children (Quennerstedt 2009).

*Identity politics*

A third important way of legitimising a parental right to educational authority (besides the liberal tradition and the conventions mentioned) is what we can call the recognition factor, meaning that more or less demarcated cultural minority groups (ethnically based or with the same language or some other common factor) have demanded the right to reproduce their specific values and identity. Mostly this situation is and has been applicable to cultural minorities of different kinds. There have been strong calls, for example, among those we could (with Brian Barry 2001) call multiculturalists, for the state to recognise group identities by granting groups exemptions from certain laws, publicly “affirming” their value and providing them with special privileges and subsidies – independent schools based on different group identities being one way of doing this. This concentration on cultural recognition implies, more or less without exception, that the power of parents is expanded, while many cultures actually have strong parental authority. This of course also creates specific situations in relation to cultures where the views of women and children can be said to be unequal. As Susan Moller Okin points out, “because of the general tendency of most cultures to try to control the lives of girls and
women more than those of boys and men, women’s capacities to exit their cultures are usually considerably more restricted than men’s” (Moller Okin 2003, p. 334).

The three ways of legitimising the parental right to educational authority – (a revitalisation of) classical liberalism, use of the international conventions and the recognition factor – do not appear to be questioned within political philosophy either, even if its goal, as in the case of Seyla Benhabib, is to argue for the development of deliberative democracy and its claim is that we have to learn to live with the otherness of others whose ways of being may be deeply threatening to our own.

To do this, to organize and give schools curricula that are in line with deliberative democracy and a cosmopolitan orientation, we have to make scope for schools as encounters between different social, cultural and ethnic groups and for a deliberative communication with “an endeavour to ensure that each individual takes a stand by listening, deliberating, seeking arguments and evaluating, while at the same time there is a collective effort to find values and norms that everyone can agree upon” (National Agency for Education 2000, p 6, my translation, cf. Englund 2006) even if these values and norms not can be reached in every situation.

**Deliberative communication as a way to develop a cosmopolitan curriculum and orientation**

In earlier works (Englund, 2000, 2006), I have developed the idea of deliberative communication as consisting of five components: (1) that different views are confronted with one another and arguments for these different views are given time and space to be articulated and presented in the classroom (cf. Habermas, 1987, 1990, 1996; Gutmann & Thompson, 1996); (2) that there is tolerance and respect for the concrete other and that participants learn to listen to the other person’s argument (Habermas, 1987, 1996; Benhabib, 1992); (3) that elements of collective will formation are present, i.e. an endeavour to reach consensus or at least temporary
agreements and/or to draw attention to differences (Habermas, 1987, 1996; Gutmann & Thompson, 1996); (4) that authorities/traditional views (represented, for example, by parents and traditions in different senses as well as the teacher) can be questioned and that there are opportunities to challenge one’s own tradition (Gutmann, 1987; Nussbaum, 1997); (5) that there also (outside of the classroom) is scope and a permissive atmosphere for students to communicate and deliberate without teacher control, i.e. for the continuation of argumentative discussions between students with the aim of solving problems or shedding light on them from different points of view (Hoel, 2001, for a short presentation of the model of deliberative communication, see Englund, 2006).

I have further developed the implications of this model in many earlier contributions (Englund 2006, Englund ed. 2007) and what I will do here to conclude this paper is to relate to the ongoing and often heated discussion between deliberation and agonism as ‘models’ for classroom discussion5 I will give some basic arguments why to prefer deliberation to develop a cosmopolitan orientation while at the same time listen to the challenge from agonism.6 (1) First I find the critique from Mouffe (2000, 2005) and her followers often unjust when giving Habermas a conflict-free, rationalist view, especially concerning how the pursuit of consensus is developed, a view that he does not have (at least in my way of reading him). I find rather, as said earlier referring to Erman (2009), deliberation as constitutive of conflict, i.e. starting from different, struggling views of anything (cf. my p.1 in my characterization of deliberative communication). (2) Secondly, I think that some of the ideals of agonism are not suitable for discussions in the classroom. As I see it, deliberation puts the problem, the different views of anything, in focus while agonism puts the focus of the different (often


6 This field is growing very fast and there are many aspects possible to discuss. What I am doing here is just to point at some crucial issues, while I at the same time want to stress that I find more of similarities that differences between the two approaches, differences in many ways overstated by Mouffe. I also think it is necessary to distinguish between two levels of this discussion, its implications on a societal level and a classroom level, where I am, in this text, mainly interested in the classroom level of discussion.
ethnic) identities of the persons involved, not the problem (whatever it is) in itself. Putting the personal identities in focus rather lead to struggles between persons, i.e. views built in to and deeply rooted in identities. 3) Thirdly, identity-based discussions, differing from where discussions are focused on a problem, also tend to bring passion to the discussion (which also is explicitly underlined in agonism saying that deliberative theorists underestimate emotions) – a passion that I think, from a cosmopolitan perspective, would be hesitant to promote. I think, from a deliberative point of view rather, that passion in the classroom if possible has to be (self-)controlled and nuanced, still giving room for commitment in the argumentative process, and that a main guideline for classroom discussion has to be, as Nel Noddings has remarked in her critique of Habermas, “to help students learn how to conduct ideal conversations” (Noddings 1994/2002 p. 122).

However, there are many more aspects in the debate on deliberation / agonism to comment upon and one specific thing is (as I touch upon in note 6) if we should follow the Habermas/Mouffe-debate or if we, as I would prefer, develop our specific models for deliberative and/or agonistic discussions within classrooms in schools without losing the relation to the Habermas/Mouffe-debate. In that case I mean that we have reflect upon, as I already have mentioned, the specific conditions of classrooms with teacher-students-relationships and other institutional conditions (cf. Bingham & Sidornik 2004, Englund ed. 2004) that are important to go on with comparing these models for classroom discussion, for example, to develop deliberative attitudes, ‘deliberativeness’ including transactional listening (cf. Waks 2011), the practical intelligence of actors must be nurtured through schools as encounters being a function of knowledge, education and culture.

7 Young people often tend to exaggerate and make conflicts person-bounded, which I think in many cases would be a threat to and a risk using violence. With that I do not mean that conflicts should be negated, not at all because they are constitutive for deliberation, but they have to be situated in the structures where they belong (something of which there of course also may be very different views upon, different views which have to deliberated upon).

8 However, notify my stress of the possibility of questioning of authorities, also the teacher.
To give one example. As pointed out by Maeve Cooke (2007), the question of whether ethical conflicts are in principle irreconcilable has implications for what democratic institutions like schools can do. If ethical conflicts never can be solved they must be dealt with through certain kinds of devised institutional arrangements. In our work from 2008, Englund; Öhman & Östman (2008) write that

one way of involving moral reactions in education, while avoiding indoctrination or symbolic violence, is to make it possible for students to express and share experiences of moral reactions but without moralizing or attempting to convince anyone. By sharing narratives of situations in which moral reactions occur, the students are offered opportunities to expand both their awareness of different moral reactions and their ability to understand the varieties and complexities of deep, existential questions. This means that moral reactions are included in ethical reflections, where students evaluate different alternatives, formulate valid arguments for their standpoints, consider other people’s arguments, learn more about their own and others’ emotional reactions, and so on. An important aspect of ethical discussions is also that ethical theory can be introduced, which can serve as a way of transforming the moral issues from the private to the public. A recurrent integration of ethical reflection in educational practice can accordingly be seen as an important way of strengthening students’ ability to participate in democratic conversations (Englund; Öhman & Östman 2008 p. 44-45).

Any study of the public, implying an understanding of schools as potential weak publics, (Englund 2011) and its problems today must aim at cross cultural communication through the formation of nascent publics, and must take account of the barriers that inhibit it. By using conceptual perspectives developed by Habermas on normative rationalization (1996, cf. Englund 2009), the institutionalization of deliberative processes (cf. Englund 2010) and with cosmopolitan hope based on universal reason seeing human development as development of the capacity to transcend local prejudices of one’s immediate context (Nussbaum 1997, 2010), it will be possible to exemplify and critically investigate different ameliorative and deliberative educational practices towards a cosmopolitan orientation.
References:


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