"I already know how I feel about this": using assessment to encourage criticality

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Abstract

Tutors involved with teaching and assessing a global citizenship module identified a potential conflict between global citizenship's values-laden status and the academic and professional standards (TDA, 2007), requiring student teachers to demonstrate critical engagement. In an attempt to facilitate more critical engagement with the relatively new curriculum subject of global citizenship, students generated specific assignment criteria. This approach is evaluated through scrutiny of student assignments. Initial research findings suggest that criticality can be facilitated through some student ownership of the assessment process; in addition, there is a need for tutors to reflect on what may influence their interpretations of assessment criteria. Further critique of the tutor-designed analysis model suggests opportunities for, and potential value in, increased student engagement with the model. Plans are in place for a pilot study with future cohorts.

Introduction

"Global citizenship in primary and secondary schools is needed for the future of both pupils and society" (DEA, 2008, page 2). The Cambridge Review (2009) advocates the promoting of "interdependence and sustainability", and the advancement of children's "understanding of human rights, democratic engagement, diversity, conflict resolution and social justice" (2009, pages 30-1). Pigozzi argues, 'the need to attend to global citizenship education is essential' (2006, page 1). However, difficulties are embedded within the values-laden nature of global citizenship.

Undoubtedly, some students will have made choices relating to pre-existing interests in global citizenship, possibly underpinned by deeply held beliefs. Others will find themselves at the same sessions perhaps simply because more appealing options were full or didn't exist in the first place. However, both globally motivated and globally nonchalant students may respond similarly: the individual and collective student response may be uncritical of the place of global citizenship within the curriculum. Those who have chosen to be there may accept the rightness of global

citizenship. Students unfamiliar with global citizenship may adopt the promoted values because they are familiar with institutional assessment procedures and feel that concordance is "strategic" (Entwistle, 1997, page 19), i.e. is necessary "in order to achieve the highest possible grades", or, perhaps more realistically, to pass.

However, "strategic" engagement with global citizenship conflicts with the notion of students developing as reflective practitioners: the Training and Development Agency for Schools (TDA) notes that "those recommended for the award of QTS (Qualified Teacher Status) should…have a creative and constructively critical approach towards innovation" (TDA, 2008, Q8, page 6). Rather than strategic engagement, teacher training institutions should seek critical engagement. However, academic and practitioner research providing critical perspectives on global citizenship seems limited (e.g. Scruton, 1985; Davies, 2005). More often, global citizenship literature tends to provide examples of effective organisation (DfES/DfID, 2005; QCA, 2007), suggestions for activities (Oxfam, 2008), or, at most, critiques of how global citizenship is approached (e.g. Marshall, 2005) rather than of assumptions about the "rightness" of global citizenship in terms of curricular content, values and pedagogical approach. How might we enable students to develop criticality?

We have found that student engagement with a range of Assessment for Learning approaches (ARG, 2002) seems to encourage criticality, for example criticality of assumptions about "best practice". This seemed particularly relevant for the global citizenship students: they have limited experience of global citizenship in schools and therefore an increased dependence on published case studies, which carry the gravitas of best practice. This, however, might only enable students to critique the way in which global citizenship is organised and presented in the classroom, much as Marshall (2005) does. We wanted students to address critically the place of global citizenship in schools, particularly in the light of its current non-statutory status in the primary curriculum and potentially higher status (QCA, 2008; Rose, 2009).

Formative assessment is itself a broad church, but, for the purposes of this module we decided to develop opportunities for students to design their own assessment criteria. The Assessment Reform Group (2002, page 2) argue that "understanding

and commitment follows when learners have some part in…identifying criteria for assessing progress"; Falchikov supports this (2004, page 128). Sivan (2000) had already explored this: students (employed as teachers) "suggest criteria for assessing their fellow students" (2000, p. 198). Sivan records how students, having engaged in the process, have "increased their understanding and thus facilitated their learning" (2000, p.204). We felt that the model could be developed to provide students with an applicable classroom model and an opportunity for developing their critical thinking on global citizenship.

Methodology: developing student generated assessment criteria

The 20 credit undergraduate module: 'Global Citizenship across the Primary Curriculum' is offered, as an elective, to student teachers in the third and final year of their undergraduate degree with QTS. Students on three campuses (Ambleside, Carlisle and Tower Hamlets) can opt for this elective. Assessment for Learning (AfL) principles (ARG, 2002) are intrinsic to the module: students are encouraged to engage with global citizenship issues through participatory and collaborative methodologies, modeling approaches to global citizenship for the primary classroom. In line with AfL principles and influenced by the work of Sivan (2000) and Falchikov (2004) the students were given the opportunity to generate specific assessment criteria for the module's assignment. The purpose of these criteria was to clarify how the University's generic Level 6 criteria for final year undergraduate assessment could be interpreted through the assignment title,

"All primary pupils have an entitlement to learning about Global Citizenship." Respond to this statement critically and consider how to get pupils engaged with Global Citizenship.

Assignment title, 2009.

We (the tutors) subsequently combined the three groups' lists of assessment criteria and selected what appeared to be the clearest and most specific criteria and applied minimal editing to produce the final list of student generated criteria. We provided an interpretation of the students' assessment criteria, including explanatory statements for each one with session time allocated for further clarification (Table 1). This was in accordance with Rust *et al*'s findings that assessment criteria are seen by students "as of limited practical use if presented in isolation without the benefit of explanation, exemplars and the opportunity for discussion" (2003, p.151).

Final Criteria	What we understand that we will look for in your assignments
Demonstrate a critical understanding of relevant terminology and the provision for GC in the curriculum.	Acknowledge different interpretations when defining terms such as: Global Citizenship and entitlement.
Draw critically on your own experience and/or case studies to illustrate your discussion.	Choose relevant examples; avoid too much description e.g. 'I did this and then I did this and the children did this…'; look at the practice as an outsider and discuss the possible strengths and areas for improvement e.g. 'It seemed that the children were fully engaged with the activity however aspects of this approach meant that….'.
Discuss how GC can be addressed in a way which engages and includes all pupils.	Make some reference to relevant strategies (ECM) and guidance on Inclusion to demonstrate your awareness of how GC approaches might engage and include learners. Show your awareness of how the GC content might be inclusive.
Show that you have taken into consideration relevant and up to date research and view-points around the subject.	Demonstrate your use of relevant documents (Oxfam, 2006; DfID, 2005) and some further reading to support your emerging personal philosophy.
Demonstrate your point of view through a balanced and coherent argument.	Demonstrate your point of view through a balanced and coherent argument.
Use: standard English, an appropriate academic tone and Harvard Referencing.	Consistently use: standard English, an appropriate academic tone and Harvard Referencing. Show that you have proof read your work.

Table 1

Methodology: researching criticality and global citizenship

Our approach to this research is informed by models of action research (Taber, 2007; Opie, 2004). Such models focus on identifying an issue and implementing and evaluating a change to effect further developments in practice. Our interest in exploring how a values-based curricular 'subject', like global citizenship, can be engaged with through a more objective and critical lens has led us to develop a model of analysis that draws on Zimmerman's (1990) notion of the self-regulated learner. Our model maps examples of students' written language, from their assignments, on a double continuum (Figure 1).
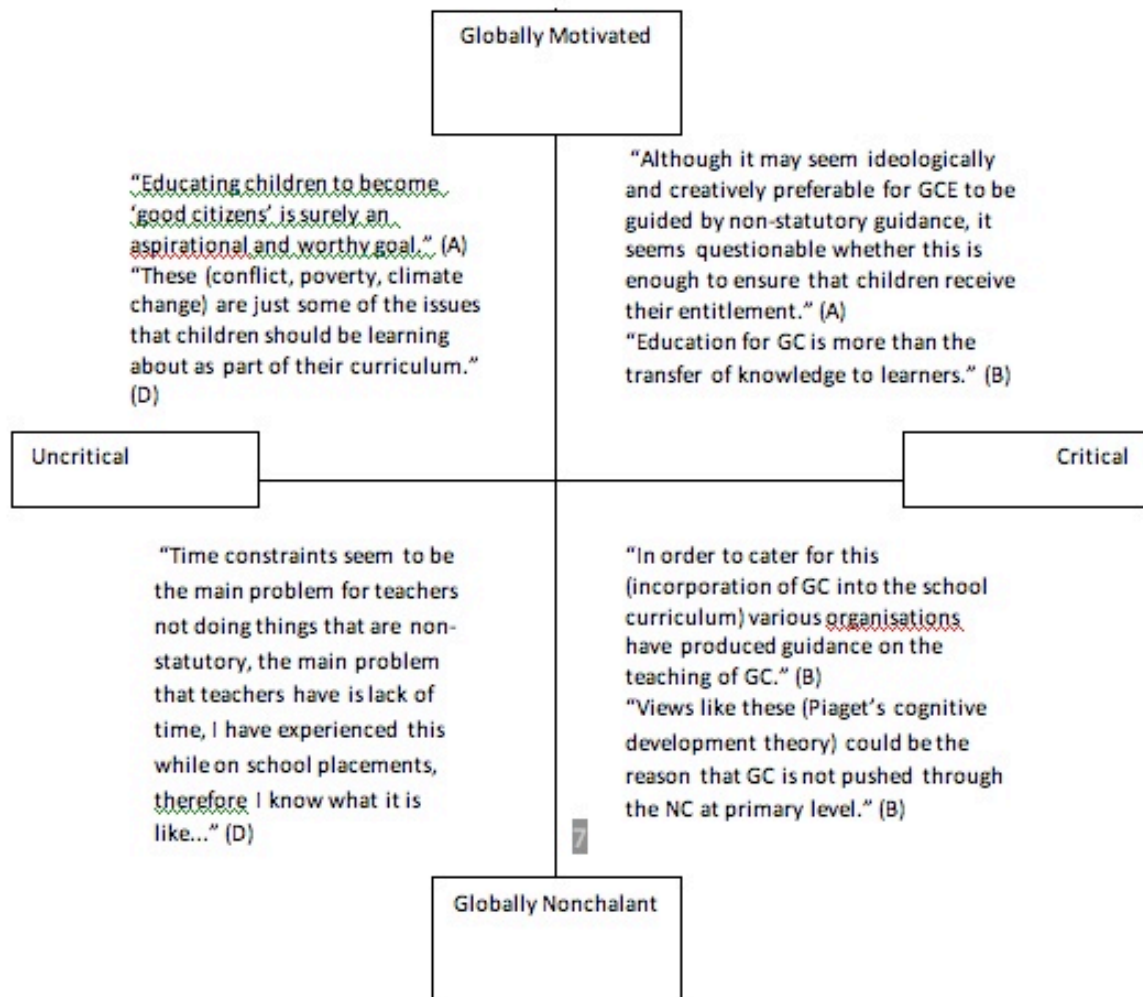
(The bracketed letters indicate the grade awarded to the assignment from which the quote is taken.)

The role of GC in the primary curriculum (Figure 1)

The horizontal axis is a continuum from uncritical to critical and the vertical axis from 'globally motivated' to 'globally nonchalant'. The purpose of the model is to explore whether some categorisation is either possible or helpful in informing our understanding of students' critical engagement with global citizenship modules. This is an evolving model: we hope that our initial, tentative mappings will invite critique and stimulate suggestions for further development.

Discussion

Examples of learner ownership of success criteria, a key tenet of the ARG's ten principles (2002), are limited. Sivan (2000) hands the process over to Higher Education students, however the criteria generated are process-orientated, focusing on steps which students need to take in order to successfully engage with peer assessment. We would argue that models such as these do not represent genuine learner ownership: they simply allow the learner the opportunity to re-express the teacher's guidance in the learner's own words. This seems problematic, perhaps especially when dealing with a values-laden field, such as global citizenship.

However, genuine learner ownership can be difficult to achieve. Students unused to independent engagement with criteria may ask for, or require, criteria to be set by the institution or the tutor, and tutors need to acknowledge this (Rust *et. al*, 2003; Read and Hurford, 2008). Furthermore, students already immersed in institutional criteria might merely reproduce the types of criteria they had been provided with for previous assignments. In effect, students might produce process criteria, that is, criteria indicating "what makes a good critical assignment". That our assignments needed to be marked against the University's level 6 generic criteria (with which students were provided as part of the criteria-generating process) exacerbated this.

A further obstacle is the role of the teacher/tutor. The assignment was designed by tutors; the process of students generating assessment criteria for the assignment was initiated, planned and delivered by tutors; the element of publication (Table 1), was entirely in the hands of tutors. However objective we sought to be, our own biases around what a successful response to the question might consist of will have come into play, raising questions about how assessment, particularly in values-laden curriculum areas, might be organised.

A key challenge in reviewing students' language was to find an efficient model for categorising criticality. We used a continuum (a model explored in other contexts [Slater *et al,* 2009]) from uncritical to uncritical as the basis, but recognised that students came to the module with contrasting energies relating to global citizenship. This led to a further categorisation of student language as "globally motivated" (i.e. suggesting an already established global predisposition) or as "globally nonchalant" (i.e. suggesting no particular interest other than a "strategic" one to pass the module, Figure 1). However, both "motivated" and "nonchalant" carry values-laden implications: by attaching these labels to student language our categorisation of their responses may already have been compromised. Furthermore, students intending to pass the module might make a strategic decision to avoid language suggesting nonchalance. Indeed, looking at the submitted assignments, this does seem to be the case.

Conclusions

In marking and subsequently analysing the students' work in more depth, the distinction that we have made between motivated and nonchalant does not necessarily correlate with students engaging at, respectively, a critical or uncritical level: for example, exemplar language from both A and D graded assignments falls in the Uncritical/Globally Motivated quadrant. This suggests that, whilst as globally motivated tutors we may sometimes confuse the characteristics of motivation with those of "good essay writing", we have not done so consistently.

On the other hand, the work of students who assume a possibly strategic stance, and draw on wider reading in ways that sustain criticality, may be labeled as "lacking a clear personal perspective". Our interpretation of criticality seemingly requires students' work to evidence the development of a *personal* philosophy, informed by critical engagement with competing perspectives. One student-generated criterion identifies the significance of the students' own perspectives: "Demonstrate your point of view through a balanced and coherent argument." However, this could be articulated without recourse to demonstration of a personal philosophy: a strategically motivated student might demonstrate this by juxtaposing opinions

gleaned from wider reading. Hence we may penalise students who write critically but who do not exhibit explicit globally motivated tendencies.

This possible level of unreliability in our marking also reveals limitations in this double continuum model and in our analysis of student language use. The decision to place certain phrases in certain quadrants is subject to our own filters and is consequently open to challenge. This is to an extent an inherent problem with tutor subjectivity when marking against imprecise criteria.

Given these difficulties, we feel a constructive next step would be to explore the use of a double-continuum model such as this with students. One approach would be for students to place themselves, as students of global citizenship, onto the double-continuum; the relative significance of criticality and motivation could be discussed and shared understanding approached; language could be mined for hidden meaning; tutor expectations could be made explicit. Perhaps a model, which synthesises the competing, demands of a values-laden curriculum area and a critically reflective profession might begin to evolve through the filter of genuine student ownership. Alongside this emerging student ownership, tutors would adopt a facilitatory role encouraging students who may find the process of identifying and addressing their own learning needs challenging and unnerving. Through open student-tutor dialogue attention could be focused on student criticality and how student predispositions to global motivation or nonchalance may influence tutor marking.

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