

Recognition and representation of citizenship in marginalised communities: the role of community educators

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citizenship

- Citizenship as status and practice and as feelings
- Citizenship is felt viscerally through everyday experience. Whilst we may share common citizenship, it is filtered through personal experiences and narratives (linguistic, religious, cultural, historical) that cannot simply be interchanged, or understood in non-embedded terms
- discrimination may undermine a sense of belonging and negatively impact on an attitude to participate outside ones immediate individual or community concerns (Pratti et al, 2018, Giles and Evans, 2016).

citizenship education

Competency framework – knowledge, skills, attitudes – aiming to give ‘... the ability to act as responsible citizens and to fully participate in civic and social life ...’

Whilst the European citizenship competency framework seeks to support cultural diversity this is set within a social milieu that often misunderstands or misrepresents the complexity of multiple identities, and marginalises the voices of the other.

“The calls for peace and justice for Palestinians echo far beyond the Muslim community. People of all faiths and none have taken to the streets in diverse, impassioned marches Yet British Muslims find themselves caught up in this, thrown into “culture wars” not of their choosing ... The conflict has been cynically manipulated to stoke hatred against Muslims, orchestrated not only by far-right elements, but also by those who deploy harmful tropes to silence peaceful advocacy for Palestine”. (Zara Mohammed, secretary-general of the Muslim Council of Britain, The Guardian, 7 October, 2024)

Re: Cañada Real

Despite making political representation through formal channels, protest and a publicity campaign using Alinsky-type tactics, residents feel ignored by the authorities. Indeed, a Regional Commissioner, dismissed their concerns as ‘noise’ (Galloway, 2022).

Third-generation British-born Bangladeshis from east London:

The development of a Br-Islamic identity

One of the most deprived minority ethnic communities in the UK.

Young British-Bangladeshis face alienation, discrimination, racial exclusion, disaffection, and working-class realities within the broader context of Islamophobia.

An identity conundrum - many are living through as they negotiate what it means to be British, Bangladeshi and Muslim, and their predicament of not fully belonging to either a British national space nor a Bangladeshi cultural community.

The development of a Br-Islamic identity

Hoque's study finds that many young British-born Bangladeshis have developed and socially constructed a syncretic identity for themselves, which he terms Br-Islamic.

This positive public identity is dynamic and borderless and enables them to negotiate and fuse the many segments of their multifaceted identities of being 'British' (nationality/ citizenship), Bangladeshi (ethno-racial) and Muslim (religious).

A Br-Islamic identity also offers a sense of belonging to an 'imagined' (Anderson, 1983) global Islamic community – the umma – where race, nationality, citizenship and the colour of passport is insignificant compared to global brotherhood and sisterhood

Community educators have a role ...

- to connect with these young people in informal community spaces (local parks, youth centres, football fields, council estates, mosques) places of familiarity and belonging for them
- reminding them of their worth and value, and also teasing out the many valuable contributions they are making as responsible citizens.
- To connect with mainstream education

For citizenship education to be relevant, it must be more than a tick-list of achievement, and provide a space that bridges important layers of community, religious and cultural identity and the mainstream, a space that allows young people to negotiate their sense of belonging and citizenships.

Learning Cañada Real: Responding to marginality and resistance through course development

- Cañada Real Galiana, or Cañada Real, is considered Europe's largest shanty town and described as "one of Europe's poorest neighbourhoods". There is a strong presence of minorities who are discriminated against in Spanish society.
- Storm Filomena worsened the situation by covering Madrid in snow, causing freezing and damaging water pipes. Estimated to affect 1800 children, UN special rapporteurs (United Nations, 22 December 2020) concluded that this condition:

‘... not only violates these children’s right to adequate housing, it is having a very serious effect on their rights to health, food, water, sanitation and education’

Educational response at UAM

In developing a new module, the team were keen to ensure that voices from Cañada Real were heard, and embedded in the teaching and learning strategy from a critical participatory approach and within a community based action programme (Fine, Torre, Oswald and Avory, 2021).

Central to this was creating dialogical, critical and sensitive pedagogical spaces in which students and teachers could dialogue and question themselves about the different conditions (political, social, cultural, educational, etc.) of injustice and oppression that were experienced in the community.

Towards a pedagogical approach to citizenship education that recognises and represents voices from the margin.

- there can be no 'one-size-fits-all'
- a commitment to social justice, and universal values with focus on a human rights approach
- commitment to social justice is not superficial, it often necessitates courage of conviction
- at the heart of recognition and representation is respect for the dignity and knowledge of all
- the starting point to access this knowledge is to hear the stories of the marginalised
- collaboration with community activists and organisations is often an imperative to begin to establish mutual trust
- It involves creating dialogical, critical and sensitive spaces in which all young people can negotiate their identities and citizenships, with the aim to enable their full participation in civic and social life.