

Research paper

Citizenship education in Lebanon: An introduction into students' concepts and learning experiences

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Contextualization

In this study, I pilot one of two instruments used to explore the challenges of teaching and learning citizenship education in the *National and Civic Education* classroom in Lebanon. The first instrument investigated teachers' concepts of citizenship and their teaching experiences inside the classroom through semi-structured interviews and has been disseminated in *Reflecting Education* (see Akar, 2006). From the findings, I saw it to be necessary for students to participate in this study so as to triangulate the themes that have emerged; hence, this second instrument, a survey pack that includes a whole-class discussion.

Citizenship education has been a compulsory subject across all year levels in Lebanese school systems ever since Lebanon's independence from the French in 1946. In essence, citizenship education is used as a tool for social cohesion and this study begins research into understanding the challenges of learning citizenship in Lebanon's civics classrooms. Following the 1976-1989 Civil War and the continuing social and political tensions that hinder development, re-construction and democracy in Lebanon, research in the post-conflict sectarian country has increased in the 21st century.

Findings from this initial research study with children and the previous one with students have shown themes similar to those found in other identity-based post-conflict societies (see Weinstein, Freedman, and Hughson, 2007). Furthermore, I also intend to disseminate good practices when collecting data from children such as providing opportunities for self-reflection and meta-learning and empowering children as participative agents with whom researchers can consult.

Abstract: *Lebanon continues to use citizenship education as a tool for social cohesion in its post-conflict sectarian society. Recently, teachers from previous studies (Akar, 2006) have raised certain issues concerning the challenges of teaching citizenship in Lebanon's National and Civic Education classrooms. This initial study in Lebanon explores some of the challenges that students face when learning citizenship within their classroom by investigating their concepts of citizenship in addition to their learning experiences. Thirty-one students from two year-11 classrooms in different schools participated. During a 45-minute class lesson, I administered a survey pack collecting quantitative and qualitative data. This pack included a diamond ranking exercise, open-ended questions and a 15-minute class discussion at the end of class. Evidence showed that these students value active and dynamic behaviours based on humanistic and democratic principles. They also demonstrated a strong sense of national identity with little or no reference to a global one. Finally, the findings showed that traditional methods of learning such as memorization and the paradoxical climate of learning democratic civic behaviours in a society of internal conflicts further challenged their learning experiences.*

Introduction

The recent history of Lebanon has been characterized by religious and political tensions including a civil war from 1975-1989 and severe internal political tensions in November 2007

that have gridlocked the Presidential elections. However, Lebanon is considered “unique amongst Arab countries for its consociational democracy” (Sadiki, 2004, p. 173; for consociational democracy, see Lijphart, 1991, and Huntington, 1991). Moreover, Lebanon has adopted a power-sharing model; the “only democratic model” appropriate for divided societies (Lijphart, 2006, p. 45). Yet, following the Israeli-Lebanese war in July 2006 and the presidential elections in November 2007, young adolescents have been active in politically motivated struggles such as clashes on university campuses and the rearmament of young members in political parties. At the same time, young active members have also expressed a willingness for more peaceful alternatives such as dialogue for compromise. Either way, Lebanon uniquely cultures generations of adolescents and young adults highly engaged and active in its political sphere. However, the country continues to face tensions and conflicts within its sectarian and divided society and, at the same time, continues to use citizenship education as a tool for social cohesion.

Citizenship education continues to be regarded as an essential tool for development. Indeed, “education remains the most effective defence against underdevelopment and poverty” (McKinnon, 2007, p. vii). Although education is not a magical tool for creating a perfect world, it aims at **reducing** the degrees of inequality and war (Delors, 1996). In short, through education, we learn to live together (Delors *et al*, 1996). Furthermore, citizenship education provides the means of social, political and economic development following conflict or social and political changes (c.f. Banks, 2004b; Lee, Grossman, Kerry, and Gregory, 2004; Tawil and Harley, 2004). Hence, researching citizenship education in Lebanon may help us better understand the gaps between desired outcomes of education for social cohesion and the actual learning of citizenship education.

In this study, I pilot a measuring instrument as an initial stage in exploring the challenges of learning citizenship in Lebanon’s schools for a more cohesive and unified society. Through this, I investigated how some secondary school students in Lebanon view their own citizenship. I also explored their learning experiences in the *National and Civic Education* classroom. From looking at these concepts and experiences, we can further enhance methodologies of collecting data from students in citizenship education classes. Furthermore, we can also begin highlight challenges students face in learning to be effective members in a post-conflict sectarian society.

Conceptual Frameworks

This research study is grounded in two frameworks of citizenship education – concepts and pedagogy. Theorists across disciplines are continuously conceptualizing ideas of citizenship that cover social, political and economic development. Many theorists have conceptualized citizenship in threes. For instance, Marshall (1950) divided citizenship into three basic elements: civil, social and political. In Crick’s (1998) report on citizenship education, the new curricular subject was based on social and moral responsibility, community involvement and political literacy. More recently, Osler and Starkey (2005) organized the concept of citizenship as a legal status, feeling and practice. Marshall’s and Crick’s presentations of citizenship clearly demonstrate the construction of models for specific aims. Marshall aimed at rights for social equality and justice while Crick aimed at political engagement in England. Since some concepts of citizenship relate to varied particular communities, I looked for a model that provides a more general perspective on citizenship. Thus, I turn to Osler and Starkey’s concept of citizenship being ‘status’, ‘feelings’ and ‘practice’ as a framework in exploring the conceptualizations of citizenship in Lebanon. From this, feelings are related to one’s **identity and sense of belonging** while practice refers to **behaviours and actions based on democratic and humanistic principles**. Although the element of status plays an important role in the degrees of belonging and participation, I focus only on feelings and practice since researching status raises more critical issues when exploring minority groups and refugees.

In addition to exploring student concepts of citizenship in terms of feelings and practice, I also look for degrees of feelings and practice across a range of minimal (formal and static) to maximal (richer and dynamic) interpretations (McLaughlin, 1992, words in parentheses used by author). By looking at what citizenship means to students, we may better understand their difficulties in learning citizenship inside the classroom.

The second framework in this study informs the type of learning that is taking place inside the classroom. Typically, surface and deep approaches to learning take place where the former aims at meeting assessment requirement through rote learning and the latter results when the students intend to make meaning with pre-existing knowledge (Marton and Säljö, 1976a, 1976b). Moreover, deep approaches for effective learning, as opposed to transmission of knowledge, are informed by construction, co-construction and reviewing and monitoring of learning inside the classroom (Watkins, Carnell, and Lodge, 2007). Examples of these include putting into practice what is being taught, working with peers and having opportunities to reflect on what was learned and how it was learned. Since education plays a lead role in socializing the child for communities outside the school (Dewey, 1944 [1916]), practising citizenship inside the classroom (and school) socializes the child for the 'real world' outside the school. More specifically, dialogic practices such as debates and discussions further promote a citizenship of humanistic and democratic principles (c.f. Alexander, 2006; Mercer, 2007).

National and Civic Education Classrooms in Context

Following the French mandate (1918-1943), the Lebanese government established necessary transitions towards an independent republic through education reform. Thus, the national curriculum of 1946 aimed at promoting the Arabic language and the Lebanese national identity. Thus, the curriculum was centralized in public and private sectors and citizenship education became a statutory subject from grades one to twelve (Frayha, 2003). Citizenship education, as a subject, is officially titled *National and Civic Education*; in short, referred to as Civics.

The difference between citizenship education and civic education lies in the identity levels – national, cultural and global (Banks, 2004a) – the content addresses. To illustrate, civic education pertains more specifically to the national level with special references to civil laws, civil behaviours and nationalistic feelings. On the other hand, citizenship education is more deeply embedded in human rights education, sustainability and other themes that interchange across global, cultural and national levels of identity. This distinction has also been made by Kerr (2000) and Osler and Starkey (2005). Kerr understands the difference between citizenship education and civic education in terms of the methods of teaching where the former involves practical and active learning and the latter implies more formal teaching. However, Kerr's distinction appears to present an evaluative model of the quality of citizenship education taught in schools. This may be problematic since Civics has been commonly used as a subject title (e.g. United States, Mexico, Hong Kong, Lebanon) to promote nationalism and done so through active and participative learning. Thus, Kerr's (2000) distinction may seem more appropriate in a paradigm of surface versus deep approaches to learning. Hence, Osler and Starkey (2005) make a more appropriate distinction identifying civic education as being more institutional while citizenship education as more generic. These distinctions are further illustrated in a table by Cox (2005, p. 83).

National and Civic Education has been recently developed as part of the revised 1997 National Curriculum. Although it primarily focus on the Lebanese and Arab identities and the knowledge of civil laws and procedures, its nine main aims in the national curriculum do highlight universal values of peace and justice and active participation in the civil and political life. Table 1 highlights these themes in each of the nine main aims.

Table 1. Nine main aims of *National and Civic Education*

1. "...humanistic values in his community and country".
2. "...spirit for work and appreciation for workers in different fields".
3. "...to contribute to world development..."
4. "...critique, debate and to accept the other...peace, justice and equality".
5. "...a social spirit...larger community...enriched with a diversity of ideas".
6. "...free participation in his civil life".
7. "...Lebanese identity...through a cohesive and unifying democratic framework".
8. "...Arab identity...open to the whole world".
9. "...regardless of gender, color, religion, language, culture and any other differences".

Taken from *The Programmes of General Education and their Aims* (Ministry of Education, 1997).

Civics, in Lebanon, is taught for 30 hours per year across all grade levels. Despite the autonomy of private schools and their freedoms to provide their own teaching and learning resources, the Civics textbook is a standardized text published by the Ministry of Education and is compulsory across all schools. Also, all students in the Lebanese education system sit for two national exams: the Baccalaureate I (Brevet) following year nine; and the Baccalaureate II (Terminale) after year twelve. Due to these two major official exams, the pedagogies in years nine and twelve are more centred on 'teaching for the test'. Hence, I have chosen to explore year eleven where conceptualizations and learning experiences of civic education are more open to contributions from students and teachers.

Other research studies have explored citizenship education in Lebanon through other approaches such as curricular development, social challenges and values of humanistic and democratic principles. A slightly more detailed review of El-Amine (2003), Frayha (2004), Joseph (2005) and Shuayb (2005) is available in Akar (2006, pp. 49-50). Yet, in summary, Frayha (2003) provided a historical review on the developments of citizenship education in Lebanon starting from the Ottoman Empire to educational reforms at the end of the twentieth century. Subsequently, he then wrote a more comprehensive review on citizenship education as a tool for social cohesion in Lebanon with an emphasis on curriculum development, policy and teaching resources (*ibid.*). Around the same time, El-Amine (2003) and Shuayb (2005) produced a more critical analysis on curricular aims of citizenship education in Lebanon. Shuayb (*ibid.*) also presented findings of her investigation of the humanistic concept of care and the values of democratic principles via data collected from directors, teachers and students. Finally, Joseph (2005) focused on the social construction of citizenship through two longitudinal case studies of urban and rural families. These research initiatives demonstrate the recent and growing interest in exploring themes of citizenship both in and out of school. Still, there remains a paucity of research on teaching practices and learning experiences for citizenship in classrooms in Lebanon.

Recently, I conducted a small-scale study on teachers' concepts of citizenship and their teaching practices within the *National and Civic Education* classroom (Akar, 2006). Findings showed that teachers considered knowing one's rights and responsibilities a fundamental element of citizenship. Furthermore, the Civics teachers still valued and practiced traditions of rote learning in the Civics classrooms. In addition to rote learning, two of the teachers raised concerns about planned and unplanned debates within the classroom. From the teachers interviewed, dialogue continuously emerged as a key concept for effective citizenship. However, at the same time, teachers' concepts of citizenship varied and so did their teaching practices. For instance, while some teachers valued memorization as a primary mode of learning, others preferred to facilitate more in-class debates or nature walks. Following this small-scale study, implications to triangulate these findings have led to investigating student perspectives.

In this paper, I discuss the methodology and findings of a pilot study investigating these student perspectives. Reflective exercises were conducted as workshops with survey packs for quantitative and qualitative data in each of the classrooms. In interacting with student participants, I started to explore with them their understandings of citizenship in terms of certain themes, actions and feelings. I also explored with them their learning experiences inside the civics classroom. This project aimed at gaining an initial understanding of student concepts of citizenship as well as their learning experiences.

Methodology

The schools

I worked with a single year-eleven class in each of two private schools in Lebanon. The class in School A had nine students and there were 22 in School B. The students were between the ages of 15 and 16. There were three young girls and six young boys in School A and ten young girls and twelve young boys in School B. School A is located on the southern outskirts of Beirut while the latter is in the central district of the capital. As this was a small-scale study, the sample selection was based on purpose, opportunity and time. The purpose was primarily to test the instruments designed to explore students' concepts of citizenship and their classroom experiences. There was no intention to compare schools since the sample size was rather small and primarily for exploratory purposes. Opportunities of access into schools also played a large role in the selection. Gaining permission to research public schools is a highly bureaucratic process in Lebanon; hence, the opportunistic selection of private schools. Also, networking and connections are also critical means of access in Lebanon. I had previously taught in School A and the headmaster at School B is a colleague of the director at School A. Finally, time permitted for only two schools during my short stay in Lebanon.

From researcher to facilitator

For this study, my role switched from researcher to facilitator. I explored the issues with the students by facilitating a reflective classroom exercise using a survey pack which I designed and will discuss further in the next section. This required a full class period of 45 minutes. Facilitating these 45-minute workshops required a lesson plan which was designed by myself and approved by the director and classroom teacher. Furthermore, Arabic is the primary mode of instruction in civics classrooms and thus administering the survey packs needed to be carried out in Arabic. For data analysis, the student comments in the open-ended exercises that were written in Arabic I later translated to English and, orally, with a colleague, back-translated the meanings into Arabic for accuracy. Finally, because of the nature of the study, verbal consent was granted from the director, teacher and students to carry out the exercises and record the data. A participant information sheet on the rationale of the study and the protection of identity was provided.

Facilitating the survey pack demonstrated good practice in equally benefiting students from participating in research. The open-ended questions allowed the students to reflect on what they know. Also, they were able to review and express the learning processes they find most effective. Finally, facilitating the survey pack also promoted children's rights by consulting them for better informed teaching and learning practices inside the civics classroom (c.f. United Nations, 1989, Article 12).

The survey pack

The instrument used was a three-part survey pack. Parts A and B looked at their **concepts of citizenship** and Part C explored their **learning experiences** in the classroom. Part A was

a diamond ranking exercise which was done in pairs. Each pair was given nine small pieces of paper with themes of citizenship written on them. I generated these themes from other existing themes that had emerged from my previous findings (Akar, 2005, 2006) that appeared significant in the Lebanese context. The students were asked to paste them on a diamond-shaped model starting with what they considered to be the most important on top, to medium important and finally least important at the bottom. This took approximately ten minutes and after the whole class had completed this, we discussed what was put first, second, etc. Part B, which also explored student conceptualizations of citizenship, had two subsections of open-ended questions. The first subsection asked the students to write down three things they have done and three feelings they have felt that they consider to have made them better people in their community or communities. Following this, they were also asked to write down three things they would like to know which would help them become more effective participants in society. The second subsection asked them to answer the same questions but for an anonymous person who they consider to be an effective member in society. Parts A and B will allow me to better understand what citizenship means to them by identifying the feelings and practices associated with their concepts and experiences.

The final part comprised four open-ended questions: 1) what lesson they had enjoyed most in their Civics class; 2) what lesson was most difficult; 3) how they would improve the Civics class in general; and 4) space to write comments during the class discussion. Approximately five minutes were given to individually answer the questions and the remainder of the time was a class discussion on the comments written. In School A, students were asked to re-write certain statements that they made during the discussion. However, once I collected and reviewed the survey packs, there was a very low rate of written comments in the space provided for the class discussion. Therefore, in School B, I gathered a research assistant from the American University of Beirut who recorded in a notebook the comments and statements made during the discussion. From this pilot, minor changes were made to the survey pack for the main data collection. These changes are briefly reported in the conclusion.

Results and Analysis

The first two parts of the survey pack allowed the students to explore their own concepts of citizenship. The results from the diamond exercise are presented according to frequency while certain themes in the second part emerged as key concepts of citizenship. The third and final part of the survey pack generated certain issues and concerns which will be discussed later on.

Part I – The diamond ranking exercise

The diamond exercise comprises five layers starting with a theme placed on the first, two on the second, three on the third, two on the fourth and one on the fifth. I have coded the first two layers as 'top priorities'; the middle layer as 'medium priorities'; and the bottom two layers as 'low priorities'. The priorities are measured by frequency and presented as bar graphs.

School A

The nine students were grouped in pairs (one group had three) and the results are presented in a sample of four groups. In their top priorities, three of the four groups of students had placed *knowing the laws of the country you live in* within the top three spaces. While half the students had put *knowing the history of the country you live in* as a top priority, that entire half had placed it in the first single layer. In the middle layer, three of the four groups had *protecting the environment* while half the students also placed *volunteering for community*

service and *knowing the history of the country you live in*. Finally, three groups had placed *knowing good manners* and *taking care of your health* as low priorities and half the students also placed *debating with others* and *singing the national anthem*. See Figure 1 for bar graph presentations of the data.

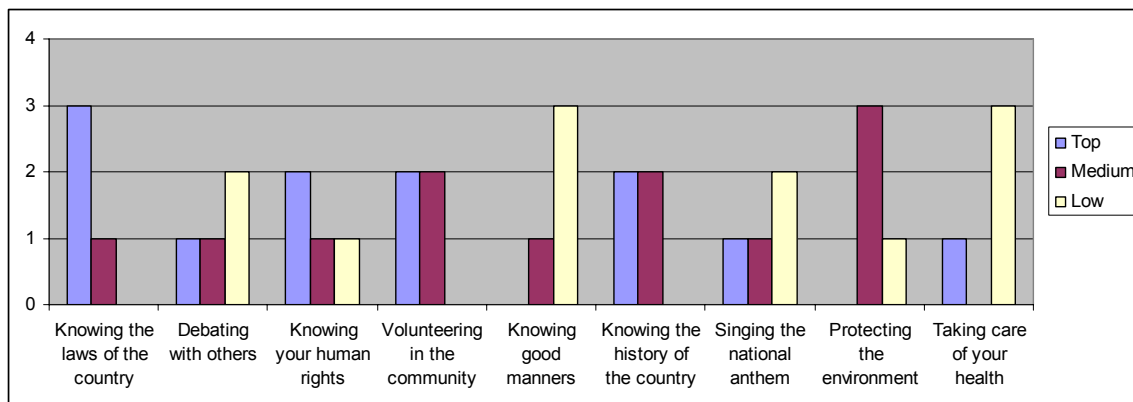


Figure 1. Diamond exercise – Results for School A

School B

The 22 students were paired and thus the results are presented in a sample of eleven groups. Ten of these eleven groups had put *knowing the laws of the country* in the top priority layers. None of the groups had put *volunteering in the community*, *protecting the environment*, or *taking care of your health* in the top layers. All the themes were placed at least once in the medium layer with *volunteering in the community* as the most frequent. At the lowest priorities, ten groups had put *protecting the environment*. See Figure 2 for bar graph presentations of the data.

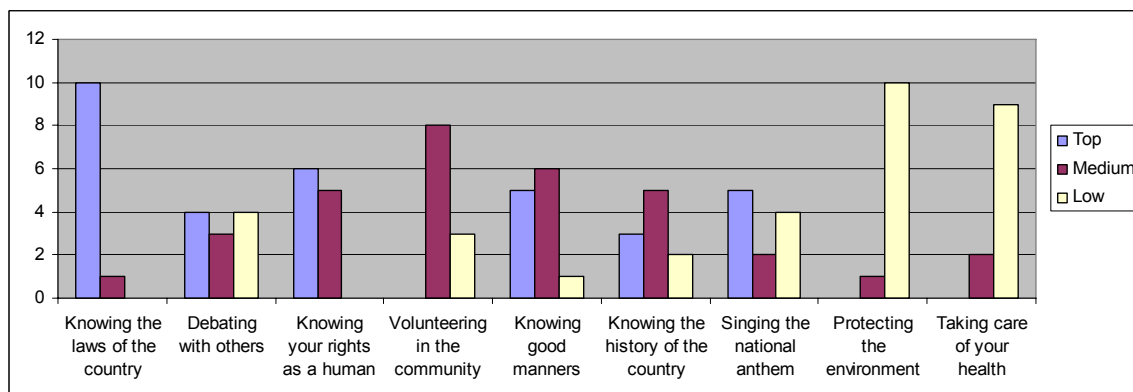


Figure 2. Diamond exercise – Results for School B

Analysis

From the diamond ranking exercises, we can start to see what the students value as important themes of citizenship (see Figures 1 and 2). Two themes were viewed as mainly top and mainly low priorities between the two schools. 'Knowing the laws of the country' in both schools was primarily top with few students finding it medium and none placing it as low. At the same time, 'knowing your rights as a human' was averaged between top and medium with only one placement as a low. From these findings, we can start to identify an emerging theme that shows a strong sense of belonging to the national civic or political community with a minimal awareness of a global community (human rights and environment). Furthermore, 'taking care of your health' was mainly viewed as a low priority;

although one group in School A placed it as a top. In addition, 'protecting the environment' was not placed in any of the top priority slots and was thus viewed as a medium to low priority. From this, knowledge of rights and responsibilities through civic laws and human rights appear to be viewed as more important than concepts of care relating to one's health and the environment.

Part II – Conceptualizing citizenship

The qualitative data collected from the open-ended section of the survey pack are coded across three areas: 'self'; 'role model'; and 'would like to...'. These three sets further illustrate their notions of citizenship and are presented in Table 2. The first code, 'self', presents statements the students have made on their own experiences of citizenship which include things they have done and feelings they have felt. The same is done for a role model; what a particular person has done and how the student thinks the person felt. Finally, the code 'would like to...' presents the students' comments on what they would like to know to help them become better or more effective members in the community or communities. The numbers in Table 2 that follow some of the themes represent their frequency. The sum of responses does not equal the total number of students for two reasons: either the students left the space blank or the comments did not fit the criteria of the categories. For instance, comments like "it is important to free the country from enemies" under the section of 'self' (things they have done) were more appropriate for the discussion sections of this paper.

Table 2. Self-concepts of Citizenship

	School A	School B
Self	Actions picking up trash being a scout leader helping others in need during the war getting an education protesting (2) helping the family giving donations (money, clothes, food) (2)	protecting and cleaning the environment (8) being member of scouts providing food and shelter during war (6) getting an education demonstrating (5) helping elderly (2) donating money to orphans and the poor (10) participating in awareness programs (i.e. drugs) (3) respecting others' views and property (2) paying taxes (3) respecting the laws (8)
	Feelings loyalty to the country pride (4) patriotism during war and protests	responsible towards the nation (2) pride when Lebanon won gold in Asia games proud for the country (5)
Role Models	Actions fought for freedom of the country (2) sacrificed time and blood for country donated money for people in need (3) represented Lebanon well	participated in the resistance (5) helped children via health and education (5) defended and protected the country (4) tried to build national unity (2) able to engage in dialogue with other people respected laws, paid taxes and voted expressed opinion honestly (2)
	Feelings	equality of all citizens (2) understands and respects other people love, loyalty, respect, responsibility for the nation (5) pride when putting Lebanon first (7)
Would like to...	vote (5) represent country fight for the country know how to do first-aid know how to be a political leader recycle know more about history of Lebanon and the lives of its leaders and martyrs volunteer at an elderly home, animal shelter, children's ward, hospital know how to solve the country's problems	vote (17) donate blood (3) know human rights and country's laws defend the country (5) protect the country's historical sites and ruins (2) protect the environment (5) improve reputation of Lebanon around the world supporting the resistance (2) remove illiteracy from the nation (2)

Analysis

Looking at what the students found representative of effective citizenship in 'self', 'role models' and 'would like to...' in Table 2, the emerging themes have been coded in two categories: 'actions' and 'feelings' of citizenship. Across both schools, 'actions' primarily illustrated values for humanistic and democratic principles. These included regards to the environment, helping those in need, respecting others' opinions and properties, caring for the environment, sacrifice and receiving an education. Helping others through donating money or directly providing necessities such as shelter and food were expressed from almost all the student participants. Other examples of helping others included knowing first-aid and donating blood. The examples include some specific to the 2006 war context such as "providing food and shelter during the war" and "defend the country".

Another war-specific value expressed by a few students was giving up time and even life (i.e. martyrdom) for the benefit of society. One of the students' role models "sacrificed time and blood for the country". This notion of sacrifice is quite unique in contemporary models of citizenship due to its controversial implications. Its notion is critically dependent on interpretations. In one sense, sacrifice may be interpreted as altruistic behaviour. However, altruistic behaviour that calls for the sacrifice of one's life may also be deemed as immoral. This finding implicates further explorations on these two interpretations of altruistic behaviour of sacrificing time and energy and the behaviour of sacrificing one's life across students' concepts of citizenship in Lebanon. Furthermore, it also raises critical questions on the extent to which the notions of sacrifice and altruism are valued as humanistic principles amongst adolescents in Lebanon.

Finally, several students valued sustainability and even the receipt of education as key elements in making them more effective members of society. Although the diamond ranking exercise showed caring for the environment was not in the top priorities, students still valued it throughout the open-ended questions.

The students' democratic values and principles illustrated various degrees of civic behaviour ranging from active to passive. Several students had noted their active participation in youth groups such as scouts. Several students expressed, through their own experiences, the value of protesting and demonstrating. Moreover, it was also interesting to see that expressing your opinion was also highly valued. Valuing the freedom of speech appears significant for some students. This particular freedom may be highly regarded today following the recent assassinations and assassination attempts of prominent journalists. These students appear to value various active forms of political engagement particularly towards the national community.

In the less dynamic sense, certain actions were also valued for effective citizenship. More than half the students in both schools combined expressed the will to vote (since they are under the voting age). Also, across the three categories in School B, a majority of the students had emphasized that paying taxes and respecting the law were key for civic behaviour. Although the two forms of civic participation may be interpreted as minimal forms of citizenship, they nevertheless appear quite significant in understanding their behaviours and feelings as members of a national community. Consequently, a strong sense of national identity emerges.

Across both schools, the 'feelings' expressed have centred on national identity. Two students, however, have identified Lebanon in a wider community; its gold medal in the Asian games and wanting to improve its reputation around the world. Still, with the remaining students, whether it was pride, respect, hope or love, their 'feelings' expressed their sense of nationalism and patriotism towards the country. Thus, they identified quite strongly with a common Lebanese identity. This Lebanese identity was also similarly found in the students'

'actions'. Although they had prioritized human rights in the diamond exercise, the students did not express a sense of a global identity throughout the open-ended sections. The awareness of human rights is a central concept in cosmopolitan citizenship (Osler and Starkey, 2005). From this, there is little evidence that there exists a sense of global identity; thus, illustrating a stronger sense of belonging to the national community rather than a regional or global one.

Finally, describing the actions and feelings of role models intended to project an image of the good citizen. One characteristic was "fighting for and defending your country" and "being part of a resistance" which highlighted a high regard towards nationalistic feelings. Another role model characterized this through the organization of dialogic activities engaging "people from different religions and sects and uniting them under one title, *love of nation*". From this strong sense of nationalism also come the civic duties of being "bound by all the laws of the country" and the will to build national unity. The students also found that helping those less fortunate such as funding children's medical and educational needs to also be good practice of the good citizen. There also emerged an appreciation for the practice of consensual agreement. One students' role model's behaviours come from the existing knowledge that "the country can only exist through consensual agreement".

Part III - Pedagogy in the classroom

In this final part, the students' written statements in the survey pack and the class discussions provided data on classroom lessons in civics they have found effective and not so effective. The students also wrote suggestions on how these classrooms can change for the better. Furthermore, some issues emerged from the class discussions as external factors that contributed to issues of learning citizenship. Thus, the data has been coded in these three categories: classroom lessons, changes to be made and external factors.

The subject contents in the two schools differed since certain themes are taught at different stages of the school year. Still, noting the subject themes may add to our understandings of student concepts and learning. In School A, eight of the nine students referred to class discussions that covered either religion or politics mainly because they had allowed them to "know more about other religions" and "about what others think about politics". In both lessons on religion and politics, the students commented on how "we argued a lot trying to convince the other of our opinion". One student commented on a lesson on the "quality of people" which covered respect for freedoms and rights and "showed us if people treated each other well, then we will live in peace". In School B, several students found the discussion on national dialogue most effective. "It was the first time I listened to the teacher"; it also "started a class argument which was tense and aggressive" and from this they experienced the challenges of reaching consensus. Another student found that the lesson on dialogue had brought out a sense of "freedom" and "belonging". Moreover, the dynamics of debates were also re-examined; "I felt that...respect for others is the key to a good debate".

These students also enjoyed the lessons on the elections and democracy and found them important because they were related to our daily lives and this is a civic duty that each citizen has to practice in order to participate in the public sphere and expressing their views on what the government does. In this lesson we had an important discussion where we spoke about issues concerning the country.

Also, two of the students found these lessons interesting "because I already follow up with the news and politics". Other effective classes included those on drugs and the environment which "affects our society" and are "close to our daily lives". Moreover, "everyone participated" in activities such as promoting awareness campaigns.

At the same time, students in both schools expressed concerns about their experiences of ineffective learning of citizenship which included memorization and the repetition of lessons which that they had taken in previous years. One particular lesson, in School B, was on parliament which was “difficult because we haven’t experienced it”. Similarly, other students felt the same towards the lessons of philosophers since they did not find them “useful”.

The students in both schools also suggested several changes that could be made. To start, students felt that there is “a lot of memorizing, no understanding”; instead, memorization should be “for history”. Furthermore, they felt that many of the lessons had been repeated throughout the years which also needed to be more relevant with their age and the current events around them. One student wants to see “more participation, projects and activities”.

Finally, students expressed concerns on some external factors that affect their learning experiences. One student expressed difficulty in finding the importance of civics lessons when they see leaders not following the civic life which is taught in schools; “and in this I see that we live in a state of lies and illusion”. Similarly, another student expressed a sense of unwillingness to contribute to the community since the people who wrote the books are not practicing themselves. In addition, students expressed inequality in this “mafia culture”. To illustrate, one student felt that the laws are “imposed on those who cannot challenge them” such as those without political power. This power struggle is also apparent, according to some of these students, when it comes to expressing opinions or the truth; “we don’t feel comfortable”. This discouragement leaves even the politically active students to feel that we should just “leave the politics for the politicians”.

Analysis

From the open-ended questions and discussions, three factors that have affected their citizenship learning experience emerged. Students raised concerns regarding repetition and pragmatics. Not only are some of the specific lessons repeated, but they appear rather impractical and thus a waste when not related to current events or their daily lives. It appears that the issue is not the content *per se*, but more so, from a curricular perspective, in identifying the relationship between the content and its pragmatics in being effective members of the community or communities.

Also, the methods of instruction seem to be regarded as a major concern. Clearly, within these two schools, rote learning appears somewhat as common practice; hence, valued as a teaching tool for certain topics. Students, on the other hand, value dialogic practice as both a civic skill and an effective learning experience. However, their experiences in the classroom were that debates were often “chaotic” and “aggressive”. From this, we can start to identify certain levels of confidence and skills teachers might have or lack in facilitating in-class debates. Nevertheless, we must not forget the legislative restrictions schools and teachers face when teaching controversial topics such as Lebanese politics in a national context of politically-rooted tensions and conflicts. In addition, traditional pedagogical methods that the teachers themselves have experienced as students also play a critical role in their confidence and skills. While the students feel that living the experience through activities and projects, there still remains deep-rooted challenges in the paradigm shift of rote-learning to more active and participative methods of teaching and learning.

Finally, the students’ perceptions of a fragmented society and corruption appear to play a role in their learning confidence of the subject. There appears to be a sense of de-motivation from hypocrisies they have found in their surroundings. These pedagogical issues of pragmatics, methods of instruction and political and social factors have also been similarly raised in my earlier small-scale study with teachers (2006) and an even wider study of schools across four societies of identity-based conflicts (Weinstein *et al*, 2007) which will be discussed shortly.

The next sections discuss the meanings of the analyses of student concepts of citizenship and their learning experiences. In this discussion, I will relate the themes that have emerged from this study to the findings of those in similar contexts. Throughout, I will raise several issues and concerns that have emerged from the relationship between these students' concepts and their learning experiences.

Discussion

The findings from this small-scale investigation raise two ideas concerning the challenges of teaching and learning citizenship in post-conflict societies.

The first idea is the extent to which the concerns raised in the context of Lebanon are similar to those in other contexts of post-conflict pluralist societies. Recently, a study was conducted on the challenges of education for peace and social reconstruction across four post-conflict pluralist societies (Weinstein *et al*, 2007). Data was collected from teachers, students, parents, administrators, non-governmental organization and others participating in the school systems in Croatia, Kosovo, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Rwanda. In these case studies, several themes emerged and were all underpinned by the fear of returning to conflict. Moreover, the themes were quite similar to those emerging from this study.

Weinstein *et al*'s findings showed levels of mistrust towards politicians and political institutions where one Serbian history teacher firmly stands by the quote, "Each time a politician open his mouth, he lies" (2007, p. 59). Similarly, the students in this study have demonstrated low levels of learner-confidence resulting from their perceptions of inconsistent practices from politicians and their institutions, "Why should we stop at the red light when the politicians don't do it themselves?" Also, the four case studies showed certain power struggles where political powers are granted to those perceived as socially superior, thus, resulting in identity-based social classes (*ibid.*). In the case of Lebanon, students' expressed the power struggles based on connections and political bullying within civic life between those in the political 'mafia culture' and the common citizen further affecting students' confidence and motivation for learning citizenship. Despite the restarting of violence, students are more open than teachers to critical thinking and open debate within the classroom, particularly in Croatia, Kosovo and Bosnia-Herzegovina (*ibid.*). In Rwanda, maintaining a 'safer' classroom means continuing more traditional ways of teaching "dominated by lectures and rote learning" (*ibid.*, pp. 64-65). Similarly, in Lebanon, students have expressed the ineffectiveness of traditional teaching methods such as memorization. These commonalities demonstrate certain trends that challenge the development of education in post-conflict societies. Furthermore, the findings from my earlier study with teachers (Akar, 2006) further triangulates these themes and the challenges students face when learning citizenship in Lebanon. This brings us to the second idea which looks deeper into **why** these themes challenge the teaching and learning of citizenship.

The challenges of teaching and learning citizenship can be further understood by looking at the students' concepts of citizenship and their relations to learning experiences within the classroom. According to these students, citizenship, or the actions and feelings these students consider to be necessary in promoting effective membership in society, constitutes several basic themes – a strong sense of belonging and identity for the national community; a high regard for the knowledge of civic rights as a presupposition to active participation; and the will to develop skills necessary for effective dialogue, democratic participation and the promotion of environmental and health awareness. However, the political and social environment and the traditional teaching methods delivered in the classroom present several contradictions to how these students perceive their development of citizenship. Therefore, the paradoxical relationship between what the students perceive as effective citizenship and the 'citizenship' society presented to these students not only challenge education as a tool

for social cohesion but also suggest the need for a critical paradigm shift in teaching and learning approaches within the civics classroom.

Finally, lessons learned from this pilot study enabled me to modify the survey pack for data collection of the main study. First, to avoid any influence of the themes in the diamond-ranking exercise towards the subsequent open-ended questions, the questions were therefore moved to the start of the pack. Although the students will do the ranking exercise individually rather than in pairs, they will still have an opportunity to discuss them during the class discussion at the end. Also, I added an empty box in the bottom right-hand corner of the diamond ranking exercise where they could write down a theme they found important but was not included in mine I provided. Additionally, I will ask them to write a few words next to the most and least important themes explaining why they put them there. Finally, with consent from the students, I will audio record the class discussions at the end for accuracy. Modifying this survey pack aims at improving the validity of the data as well as benefiting children's meta-learning and putting into practice their roles as constructive participants in the education development process.

Conclusion

This study started to explore 15-16 year-olds' concepts of citizenship and learning experiences in the civics classroom. The qualitative data showed an emphasis of knowledge of civic laws and human rights. Although they were interpreted as 'minimal' notions of citizenship, the students still demonstrated more dynamic concepts of citizenship in their open-ended responses. These students expressed dynamic behaviours based on humanistic and democratic values such as helping those in need, raising awareness of environmental and health issues, voting and participating in demonstrations. Moreover, they also expressed a strong sense of belonging to the national Lebanese community over a sectarian, regional or global one. Finally, students expressed concerns over having their learning experiences more coherent with their active and participative notions of citizenship. This included moving away from traditions of rote learning to more active approaches such as projects, activities and in-class debates.

Even through a small-scale study, the paradoxical and controversial relationships between student concepts and learning experiences are clear and evident. They only start to demonstrate the deep-rooted political and social challenges of citizenship education for social cohesion in Lebanon. Moreover, these issues also contribute to the challenges of considering any paradigm shift; such as using active and collaborative teaching and learning methods as additional tools that would support the traditionally-approached learning of civic laws and human rights. However, before making any considerations for more effective teaching and learning approaches for social cohesion in Lebanon, implications for further research into these issues and concerns are essential.

Despite the sectarian symbols with which many children, adolescents and adults in Lebanon identify, this sample of 15-16 year-olds still maintain strong levels of a national identity when considering feelings and behaviours for citizenship. One student questioned why this certain sense of a community changes when people get older, "I would like to know why people start to lose their good citizenship as they get older (or when they drive)." The youth in Lebanon are clearly aware of the social and political tensions and potential conflicts in their society. They are also highly motivated to participate in an active, democratic and humanistic society by wanting to know "how to solve the country's problems". And finally, they share a common vision of peace and social cohesion, "Just imagine a world where Muslims and Christians are equal and are brothers and no war". Continuous investigations into the challenges of teaching and learning citizenship is critical in strengthening a sense of community and living together in Lebanon and possibly also making sense of similar challenges in other post-conflict pluralistic societies around the world.

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