Human Rights, Diversity, and Citizenship Education

by James A. Banks

Abstract

The 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is a propitious time for educators to examine its implications for educating citizens in multicultural nation states. The author argues that students must experience democratic classrooms and schools that reflect their cultures and identities to internalize human rights values, ideals, and behaviors. Schools in nations around the world make it difficult for students to acquire human rights ideals and behaviors because they pursue assimilationist goals that do not provide students civic equality and recognition. Citizenship education needs to be reformed so that it will help students to internalize human rights ideals and behaviors.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on December 10, 1948, in Paris. The 60th anniversary of this landmark document is an appropriate time for educators to consider the implications of the UDHR for educating citizens in multicultural democratic nations. A consequence of the experiences of World War II, the UDHR has been highly influential. It has been translated into more than 300 languages, facilitated the spread of the idea of human rights around the world, helped to shape national constitutions and court decisions, and stimulated quests for the attainment of human rights among individuals and groups in many different nations (Clapham 2007). Article 1 of the UDHR (United Nations 1948) states: “All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act toward one another in a spirit of brotherhood.”
The promise of the UDHR is that it specifies ideals related to human rights and social justice which all nations in multicultural democratic nation states should endorse and implement. The difficulty with the ideas expressed in the UDHR is that it is much easier for nation states and institutions, such as schools, to articulate these ideals than to implement them in the classroom and the schoolyard.

I argue in this article that for human rights ideals to be implemented in schools and to become meaningful for children and youth, these ideals must speak to and address their own experiences, personal identities, hopes, struggles, dreams, and possibilities. In other words, for students to internalize the concept of human rights, they must have experiences in the school, as well as in the larger society, that validate them as human beings; affirm their ethnic, cultural, racial, and linguistic identities; and empower them as citizens in the school and in the larger society. Audrey Osler (2003, 26) stated that children are citizens, not citizens-in-waiting; consequently, they should have democratic experiences in schools that “acknowledge the citizenship rights of children.” Dewey (1938) stated that students must experience democracy to internalize democratic ideals and behaviors. I am making a similar argument about human rights (i.e., students must experience human rights to internalize human rights ideals, beliefs, and behaviors).

Rather than affirm the cultural identities of students from diverse groups, however, schools in multicultural nation states often marginalize students from racial, ethnic, cultural, language, and religious minority groups. Greenbaum (1974) stated that during the period of massive immigration to the United States in the late 1800s and early 1900s, immigrants were taught hope and shame. Groups such as Jewish Americans, Polish Americans, and Irish Americans were taught to be ashamed of their languages, cultures, and families. However, they were given hope for structural inclusion into American society if they became culturally assimilated. Cultural assimilation worked well for most White ethnic groups in the United States (Alba and Nee 2003), but not for groups of color, which continue to experience structural exclusion after they become culturally assimilated.

Although both diversity and its recognition have increased in the United States, as well as in other nations since Greenbaum’s article was published in 1974, the assimilation ideal and conception of citizenship is still robust in most nation states. As this issue is being prepared for press, I have just finished editing The Routledge International Companion to Multicultural Education (Banks 2009), which includes 40 chapters written by scholars in different nations. These chapters describe the ways that groups such as Indians in Peru, Blacks in South Africa, Koreans in Japan, Maori in New Zealand, Indians in Mexico, Muslims in France, and ethnic groups in China experience marginalization and inequality when they do not attain sufficient levels of cultural and linguistic assimilation into the mainstream cultures of their societies. I believe that these groups will not be able to internalize conceptions of human rights and cosmopolitanism until they have attained a sufficient level of structural inclusion into and identity with their societies and nation states. Structural inclusion, cultural empowerment, equality, and
Structural inclusion, cultural empowerment, equality, and recognition are essential conditions for the internalization of human rights values, attitudes, and behaviors.

Diversity and Ethnic Revitalization Movements

The rise of ethnic revitalization movements and international migration has complicated the task of designing schools that promote democracy, social justice, and human rights. These developments also have made conceptions of citizenship and citizenship education more complex in nations around the world. Since the ethnic revitalization movements of the 1960s and 1970s, ethnic groups have articulated their grievances and pushed for equality and structural inclusion. The Black civil rights movement in the United States—which echoed throughout the world (Painter 2006)—stimulated the ethnic revitalization movements. The French and First Nations (the original peoples) in Canada, the West Indians and Asians in Britain, the Indonesians and Surinamese in the Netherlands, and the Aboriginal peoples in Australia joined the string of ethnic movements, expressed their rage and anger, and demanded that the institutions within their nation states—such as schools, colleges, and universities—become more responsive to their needs, hopes, and dreams.

When the ethnic revitalization movements began in the 1960s and 1970s, the Western nations were characterized by tremendous ethnic, cultural, racial, religious, and linguistic diversity. This diversity resulted from several historical developments. The nations in Western Europe had long-standing linguistic and cultural minorities, such as the Basques in France and Spain; the Germans in Denmark; the Danes in Germany; and the Welsh, Scots, and Jews in the United Kingdom. Europe has historically been a crossroad and meeting ground—sometimes violent—of diverse ethnic, cultural, linguistic, and religious groups (Figueroa 2004). Diversity in Europe was increased when thousands of migrants from colonial nations came to Europe to improve their economic and social status in the years after World War II.

The United States, Canada, and Australia were diverse when the European explorers and settlers arrived in those distant lands. The diversity in these nations was enriched by the Indigenous peoples that the European settlers displaced, by African people in the United States, and by the large numbers of immigrants and refugees from many nations around the world who settled in these three nations to realize their religious, political, and economic dreams. The United States, Canada, and Australia have become more ethnically, racially, and linguistically diverse within the last 40 years. Although English was the most frequently spoken home language in Australia in 2006 (78.5 percent), the census indicated that more than 400 languages were spoken in homes, including Cantonese and Mandarin Chinese, Italian, Greek, and Arabic (Inglis 2009).
The U.S. Census Bureau (2008) projected that ethnic minorities will increase from one-third of the nation’s population in 2006 to 50 percent in 2042 (Roberts 2008). In 2006, ethnic minorities made up 100 million of the total U.S. population of just over 300 million. U.S. schools are more diverse today than they have been since the early 1900s when many immigrants entered the United States from Southern, Central, and Eastern Europe. In the 30-year period between 1973 and 2004, the percentage of ethnic minority students in U.S. public schools increased from 22 to 43 percent (Dillon 2006). Ethnic, racial, cultural, linguistic, and religious diversity is found in most nations (Banks 2009). It extends far beyond the nations highlighted in this brief overview.

The Assimilationist and Liberal Vision of Society

The Western nations were dominated by an assimilationist ideology when the ethnic revitalization movements began in the 1960s and 1970s. A major national goal in the United States, Canada, and Australia was to create a nation state in which one culture—the Anglo-Saxon or Anglo-Celtic—was dominant. The diverse groups that made up these nations were expected to forsake their original cultures and languages to become effective citizens of their nation states. The older nation states in Western Europe—such as the United Kingdom (Carby 1982), France, Germany, and the Netherlands—also were dominated by an assimilationist ideology. Their goal was to maintain their national identities and the cultural hegemony of existing dominant groups.

The assimilationist and liberal ideology that dominated the Western nations envisioned a nation state in which individuals from diverse groups are able to participate fully. However, the liberal assimilationist believes that for this kind of equitable, modernized society to emerge and flourish, individuals must surrender their ethnic and cultural attachments. Ethnic attachments and traditionalism, argues the liberal assimilationist, are inconsistent with a modernized society and a civic culture. Traditional cultures promote historic prejudices, we–they attitudes, and cultural conflict (Porter 1975). They also lead to the Balkanization of the nation state. Traditionalism and cultural pluralism also stress group rights over the rights of the individual and regard the group rather than the individual as primary (Patterson 1977). In a modernized, equitable society, individual rights are paramount; group rights are secondary.

Liberal assimilationists also argue that traditionalism promotes inequality, racial and ethnic awareness, group favoritism, and ethnic stratification. As long as attachments to cultural and ethnic groups are salient and emphasized, they will serve as the basis for employment and educational discrimination, as well as other forms of exclusion that are inconsistent with democratic ideals and values (Glazer 1975). According to the liberal assimilationist, the solution to this problem is a common national culture into which all individuals are culturally and structurally assimilated and public policies are neutral on questions of race and ethnicity.

Challenges to the Assimilationist Ideology

The scope and intensity of the ethnic protest movements during the 1960s and 1970s revealed that the liberal ideology that dominated Western social science and national policies had serious limitations and neither adequately explained nor predicted the
course of events or the status of ethnic groups in modern democratic societies. Western social scientists studying race relations in the 1940s and 1950s viewed the assimilation of ethnic groups as both desirable and inevitable. They were heavily influenced by the writings of Park (1950), the noted sociologist at the University of Chicago, who believed that the four basic processes of social interaction were contact, competition, accommodation, and assimilation. The ethnic revitalization movements that arose in the 1960s and 1970s invalidated Park’s conceptualization, raised serious questions about cultural assimilation, and demanded that nation states recognize and legitimize cultural, ethnic, and linguistic diversity. The leaders and scholars of the ethnic revitalization movements envisioned societies and nation states in which unity and diversity existed in a delicate and productive balance.

The structural exclusion of ethnic groups of color was a major cause of the ethnic revitalization movements. Even when these groups are highly culturally assimilated, they may still experience high levels of structural exclusion. Although African Americans and the Indigenous groups in the United States (Native American and Alaska Natives) were expected to assimilate culturally, they frequently were denied the opportunity to attain a quality education, to vote, and to participate in the political process. The Canadian First Nations had a similar experience, as did the Australian Aboriginal peoples. The Western nations created expectations and goals for marginalized ethnic groups of color, but often made it impossible for these groups to attain them.

Ethnic protest movements also arose in Western societies because ethnic groups that experienced discrimination and racism—such as African Americans in the United States and First Nations in Canada—internalized the egalitarian and democratic ideologies that were institutionalized within their nations and believed that it was possible for these ideals to be realized. Though the conditions of these groups improved in the period after World War II, they still did not have many of the benefits enjoyed by the dominant groups in their societies. In the post-war period, their governments took steps to eliminate some of the most blatant forms of discrimination and to improve their social and economic status. However, these improved conditions created rising expectations, and these expectations outpaced the improvement within the social, economic, and political systems. The disillusionment and shattered dreams that resulted from the historic quest for assimilation caused ethnic groups to demand structural inclusion and the right to retain important aspects of their cultures, such as their languages, religions, and other important ethnic characteristics and symbols.

The failure of Western nation states to close the gap further between their democratic ideals and societal realities—and the existence of discrimination and racism—do not sufficiently explain the rise of ethnic revitalization movements in the 1960s and 1970s. The cultural and symbolic components of many of these movements indicate that they emerged, in part, to help individual members of ethnic groups acquire the sense of community, moral authority, and meaning in life that highly modernized societies often leave unfulfilled. Apter (1977, 75) wrote: “[modernization] leaves what might be called a primordial space, a space people try to fill when they believe they have lost something fundamental and try to recreate it.”
As Apter (1977) pointed out, the liberal assimilationist conception of the relationship between tradition and modernity is not so much wrong as it is incomplete, flawed, and oversimplified. It does not take into account the spiritual and community needs that ethnic cultures often help individuals to satisfy. The push toward assimilation in modernized societies is counterbalanced by the trenchant pull of primordialism, traditionalism, and the search for community. The quest for self-determination, equality, and inclusion also are important factors that drive ethnic revitalization movements.

The pursuit of independence by nations in Asia and Africa during the decolonization movement that followed World War II was another important factor that stimulated ethnic revitalization movements and motivated marginalized ethnic groups to seek autonomy and respect for their cultures, languages, and identities (Figueroa 2004). The decolonization movement was especially active between 1945 and 1960, when many nations in Asia and Africa became independent from the United Kingdom and nations in Europe.

Worldwide Immigration and Education

The movement of peoples across national boundaries is as old as the nation state itself (Castles and Davidson 2000). However, never before in the history of world migration has the movement of diverse racial, cultural, ethnic, religious, and linguistic groups within and across nation states been as numerous and rapid or raised such complex and difficult questions about citizenship, human rights, democracy, and education. In 2008, the world’s population was nearly seven billion, of which approximately 200 million people—three percent—were living outside the nation in which they were born (de Blij 2009).

Many worldwide trends and developments are challenging the notion of educating students to function in one nation state. These include the ways people are moving back and forth across national borders (Castles 2009), the rights of movement permitted by the European Union, and the rights codified in the UDHR. These trends indicate that students should be educated to be cosmopolitan citizens in a global community (Appiah 2006).

Student Identifications and Citizenship Education

A goal of citizenship education in most nations is to help students develop allegiance to the nation state. The need for students to maintain commitments to their local communities and cultures or to their original homelands usually is ignored and given little emphasis in instruction. Consequently, students from diverse cultural and ethnic groups rarely experience civic equality and recognition in state or public schools. The emphasis is usually on cultural assimilation into the dominant culture of the nation state.

Research by several scholars of immigrant groups in the United States has indicated that student identities are complicated, contextual, and overlapping and that the narrow conception of citizenship education that has been embraced historically by schools is not consistent with the racial, ethnic, and cultural realities of U.S. society. This research has revealed that immigrant students have complex and contradictory transnational identifications. Several studies have confirmed this finding, including those by El-Haj (2007), who studied Palestinian American youth, and by Maira (2004), who studied working-class Indian American, Pakistani American, and Bangladeshi American youth. The findings...
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by Nguyen (2008) in a study of Vietnamese American high school students are consistent with those of the El-Haj and Maira studies.

These researchers described the nuanced and intricate identifications that immigrant youth have with the United States, their countries of origin, and their local communities. The youth in these studies—who distinguished between national identity and citizenship—viewed themselves as Palestinian, Pakistani, or Vietnamese, but also recognized and acknowledged their U.S. citizenship, which they valued for its privileged legal status and the opportunities it provides. An important implication of this research is that schools need to work to implement multicultural citizenship (Kymlicka 1995), which recognizes the right and need for students to maintain commitments to their cultural communities, to a transnational community, and to the nation state in which they are legal citizens.

Cultural, National, Regional, and Global Identifications

Assimilationist notions of citizenship are ineffective today because of the deepening diversity throughout the world and the quests by marginalized groups for cultural recognition and rights. Multicultural citizenship is essential for today’s global age (Kymlicka 1995). It recognizes and legitimizes the right and need of citizens to maintain commitments both to their cultural communities and to the national civic culture. Only when the national civic culture is transformed in ways that reflect and give voice to the diverse ethnic, racial, language, and religious communities that constitute it will it be viewed as legitimate by all of its citizens. Only then can these communities develop clarified commitments to the nation state, to democratic ideals, and to human rights.

Citizenship education should be reformed so that it will provide students with civic equality, cultural recognition (Gutmann 2004), and validation (Banks 2008). These conditions are essential to help students internalize human rights values, ideals, and behaviors. Citizenship education also should help students to develop thoughtful and clarified identifications with their cultural communities and their nation states. It also should help them to develop clarified global identifications and deep understandings of their roles in the world community. Students need to understand how life in their cultural communities and nations influences other nations and the cogent influence that international events have on their daily lives. Global education should have as major goals helping students to develop understandings of the interdependence among nations in the world today, clarified attitudes toward other nations, and reflective identifications with the world community.

The school should affirm and recognize the home and community cultures of students. However, it also should help them to develop a critical
consciousness of their home and community cultures. Critical consciousness incorporates what I have called “cultural cognitiveness,” which “involves the process of knowing, including both awareness and judgment” (Banks 2006, 75). Non-reflective and unexamined cultural attachments will perpetuate cultural and ethnic ethnocentrism.

The Complexity of National Identification and Cosmopolitanism

In addition to the school helping students to develop critical and clarified cultural identifications, it also should help students to acquire knowledgeable, critical, and analytical attachments to their nation states. Some globalization theorists, however, are highly critical of the nation state (Mayerfield 1998). Appadurai (1996, 21) maintained that the nation state is in crisis: He envisioned a post-national world characterized by “diasporic public spheres” that will be facilitated by electronic mediation and mass migration. Other theorists have emphasized the ways in which the nation state has been undercut by globalization trends and supranational bodies, such as the United Nations and the European Union (Castles and Davidson 2000).

Theorists, such as Calhoun (2007) and de Blij (2009), argued that the nation state remains significant and influential in today’s global times. Calhoun (2007, 1) stated that the nation state is “a form of social solidarity and one of the background conditions on which modern democracy has been based.” He wrote (2007, 4): “[T]he nation-state neither can be nor should be wished away. Source of many evils, it is also a framework in which the modern era produced history’s most enduring and successful experiments in large-scale democracy.” In his significant book, The Power of Place, de Blij challenged Friedman’s (2005) argument that globalization has created a flat world. He distinguished between globals, mobals, and locals. Globals are the world globetrotters who cross borders easily and have power and influence. The world for them is flat. Mobals are risk-takers who become migrants to improve their lives. Globals and mobals constitute the 200 million people who are international migrants. Locals, the poorest group, are most powerfully influenced by place. Most of them remain all their lives within the communities in which they were born.

Although it is important to help students develop knowledgeable and analytical national attachments and identifications, blind nationalism and patriotism will prevent students from attaining reflective and positive global identifications, cosmopolitan values and attitudes, and a commitment to human rights. Nationalism and national attachments in most nations are strong and tenacious. An important aim of citizenship education should be to help students develop global identifications and attachments, as well as to help them internalize human rights values. They also need to develop a deep understanding of the need to take action as citizens of the global community to help actualize social justice and human rights for people around the globe. Cultural, national, regional, and global experiences and identifications are interactive and interrelated in a dynamic way.

Students should develop a delicate balance of cultural, national, regional, and global identifications. A nation state that alienates and does not structurally include all cultural groups into the national culture runs the risk of creating alienation and causing groups to focus on specific concerns and issues rather than on the overarching goals and policies of
the nation state. To develop reflective cultural, national, regional, and global identifications, students must acquire the knowledge, attitudes, and skills needed to function within and across diverse racial, ethnic, cultural, linguistic, and religious groups.

**Cosmopolitanism and Citizenship Education**

Citizenship education should also help students develop an identity and attachment to the global community and a human connection to people in many parts of the world. Global identities, attachments, and commitments constitute cosmopolitanism (Nussbaum 2002). Cosmopolitans view themselves as citizens of the world who will make decisions and take actions in the global interests that will benefit humankind. Nussbaum (2002, 4) stated that their “allegiance is to the worldwide community of human beings.”

Cosmopolitans identify with peoples from diverse cultures throughout the world. Nussbaum (2002) contrasted cosmopolitan universalism and internationalism with parochial ethnocentrism and inward-looking patriotism. Cosmopolitans “are ready to broaden the definition of public, extend their loyalty beyond ethnic and national boundaries, and engage with difference far and near” (W. C. Parker, personal communication). Cosmopolitans view social justice and human rights globally and are concerned with threats to the world community; for example, global warming, the HIV/AIDS pandemic, and war. Students can become cosmopolitan citizens while maintaining attachments and roots to their family and community cultures. Both Nussbaum (2002) and Appiah (2006) deemed local identities as important for cosmopolitans.

Schools should help students to understand how cultural, national, regional, and global identifications are interrelated, complex, and evolving (Banks 2004). These identifications are interactive and interrelated in a dynamic way. Each should be recognized, valued, publicly affirmed, and thoughtfully examined in schools. Students should be encouraged to critically examine their identifications and commitments and to understand the complex ways in which they are interrelated and constructed.

Citizenship education should help students to realize that “no local loyalty can ever justify forgetting that each human being has responsibilities to every other” (Appiah 2006, xvi). As citizens of the global community, students should develop a deep understanding of the need to take action and make decisions that will enhance democracy and promote social justice and human rights in their cultural communities, nation, region, and the world.

Increasing diversity throughout the world today and increasing recognition of diversity—as well as the
intractable problems that the world faces—require a reexamination of the ends and means of citizenship education if it is to promote inclusion, civic equality, recognition, and human rights (Gutmann 2004). Liberal assimilationist conceptions of citizenship education that eradicate the cultures and languages of diverse groups are ineffective in the transformed world of the 21st century. Citizenship education in multicultural democratic nations should be reinvented so that it will enable students to see their fates as intimately tied to those of people throughout the world. Citizenship education should help students to understand why “a threat to justice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere” (King 1963/1994, 2–3).

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