Global citizenship and learning in communities

‘Service learning’, whereby students engage in voluntary projects with local communities, has been a feature of higher education in the US since the 1960s, and more recently has been adopted within the UK and other countries. John Annette discusses how service learning can provide a basis for global citizenship education as well as enhancing relationships between universities and their local communities.

In a recent article Professor Patrick Coldstream, the former Director of the UK Council for Industry and Higher Education, has argued for civic engagement as a core value for higher education: ‘Commonwealth universities face high expectations from the societies of which they are part. They will be judged, and learn to judge themselves, by the variety and vitality of their interactions with society. Those interactions and university decision-making to foster them, are what we term “engagement”’ (Coldstream, 2001: 12). This growing concern about the civic engagement of higher education is also shared by academics in the USA who contributed to a recent collection of essays edited by Thomas Ehrlich (2000). Ehrlich and his contributors discuss the variety of ways in which higher education can engage in partnership with local communities in developing civil society and political participation. This includes especially service learning, in which students engage in reflective learning through volunteering projects in partnership with local communities. One of the main aims of higher education, according to the Dearing Report on Higher Education in the Learning Society (1997), is to contribute to a democratic, civilised and inclusive society. Indeed, the Robbins Report on Higher Education (1963) had argued that one of the main aims was to transmit a common culture and standards of citizenship. The emphasis on citizenship highlights the need for the higher education curriculum to prepare graduates to become active citizens and to participate not only in formal politics but also play a leadership role in civil society. This notion of citizenship recognises the importance of human rights and stresses the significance of social responsibility or duty and also democratic participation. The challenge for higher education in the UK and internationally will be to act as a partner in community development locally, and also to provide the basis for the development of a global network of university/community partnerships which can support education for global citizenship and serve as a basis for global citizen action.

The Crick Report on Education for Citizenship and the Teaching of Democracy in Schools (1998) has reintroduced citizenship and learning in the community as a key feature in the debate over the structure and delivery of the national curriculum (Advisory Group, 1998 and also Davies, et al, 1999). According to the excellent research being undertaken by David Kerr of the National Foundation for Educational Research, there are a wide variety of opinions as to what should constitute an education for citizenship in the UK (Kerr, 1997 and 1999). Active citizenship is seen as including education in critical thinking, political literacy, moral values, spiritual values, emotional literacy, sustainable development, and so on. The Macpherson Report and the report on ‘The Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain’ highlight the importance of racism awareness, multiculturalism and intercultural understanding. A key feature of the curriculum will be the teaching of issues related to human rights both within the UK and internationally (Osler and Starkey, 1996; Osler, 2000a; Osler, 2000b).

The Crick Report also recognises the importance of service learning based upon the principles of experiential learning through the activity of volunteering or civic engagement. CSV and other voluntary sector organisations have highlighted the importance of encouraging awareness of political participation through civic engagement. Many schools in the UK and the United States provide their students with the opportunity to engage in service learning or in the UK ‘active learning in the community’ The problem for schoolteachers will be to integrate education for citizenship, including the opportunity to engage in service learning, into an already overcrowded national curriculum. This consideration about the teaching of democratic values and the place of service learning in the community in schools also raises some important questions about the organisation of the undergraduate curriculum in higher education in Britain.

The Dearing Report follows on from an increasing range of work done since the 1970s which has emphasised the importance in higher education of the development of what has been termed transferable, personal, core or key skills (Drew, 1998). The challenge for higher education is to provide an academic framework based on the acquisition of critical knowledge, which is mostly structured upon the present framework established by the academic disciplines, and which provides students with the opportunity to develop essential key skills and capabilities. More recently, the DfES has been supporting development work into key skills and work experience in higher education, and its significance is reflected in the CVCP/DfES report on Skills Development in Higher Education (CVCP/DfES, 1999). An important way in which students can develop key skills through work experience, and experience an education for citizenship is through service learning. At the core of service learning is the pedagogy of experiential learning, which is based on the
thought of John Dewey and more recently David Kolb, et al. In the USA the National Society for Experiential Education (NSEE) has since 1971 been engaged in the development of and research into experiential education (Eyler and Giles, 1999). More recently, the American Association of Higher Education (AAHE), in partnership with the Corporation for National Service, has commissioned volumes by leading academic figures to examine the importance of service learning in higher education. What is impressive about the work of NSEE and AAHE is that there is research done on not only pedagogic practices but also going beyond anecdotal evidence, there is research into the evaluation of the learning outcomes of service learning (see the web sites: www.nsee.org and www.aahe.org).

The Dearing Report ‘endorses the value of some exposure of the student to the wider world as part of a programme of study.’ And it states that: ‘This may be achieved through work experience, involvement in student union activities, or in work in community or voluntary settings’ (NCIHE, 1997, section 9.26). In the UK the DfES has supported research into work experience, but only recently has it begun to support research into service learning, eg FDTL projects such as CoBaLT. What is important about service learning is that it is multi-disciplinary and can be integrated into a wide variety of academic disciplines and learning experiences. It could also include environmental and global study and the opportunity for students to undertake service learning while studying abroad. Service learning can be established generically across a university but a major challenge will be to encourage disciplinary and multi-disciplinary service learning in the subject-based curriculum.

The provision of the opportunity for students to participate in service learning also requires partnerships with the university’s local communities. It is interesting to note that the CVCP Report on Universities and Communities highlights the role of universities in local and regional development but, except for the appendix by John Mohan, it does not consider how university and community partnerships will impact upon the curriculum of higher education (CVCP, 1994 and Elliott, et al, 1996). The increasing recognition of the need to provide students with opportunities to develop key skills and capabilities in higher education, in order to prepare them for lifelong learning, should hopefully encourage academics to consider how learning in the community will best provide such learning experiences. It should also encourage them to examine how the delivery of the curriculum will best meet the needs of local communities (Watson and Taylor, 1998).

In the USA a very large number of higher education institutions now provide support for community service learning, and increasing numbers of university presidents have committed their institutions to this type of learning through membership of the organisation Campus Compact (Ehrlich, 2000). Professor Benjamin Barber, in a number of influential articles and books, has advocated education for active citizenship in higher education through engaging in critical thinking about politics and civil society and through community service learning. While there has been a tradition of community-based internship and experiential education since the 1960s, the new emphasis in the USA since the 1990s has been on citizenship education and service learning (Battistoni and Hudson, 1997). At Rutgers University, Professor Benjamin Barber has established the Citizenship and Service Education (CASE) programme, which has become an important model in the USA of such an education for citizenship (see www.scils.rutgers.edu/case/case.html for the CASE home page).

In the UK, the CSV/Council for Citizenship and Learning in the Community (CCLC) has been promoting and facilitating education for citizenship and service learning in higher education by working in partnerships with over 160 programmes in higher education institutions. The aims of this national multi-disciplinary and community linked network is to promote community service learning that is accredited or certified for key skills and which meets community needs (Annette and Buckingham-Hatfield, 1999; Annette, 1999).

Some of the partner universities are the Interchange and now Community Bridge project in Liverpool (linking Liverpool, Liverpool John Moores and Liverpool Hope Universities); the Community Exchange project in Manchester (linking UMIST, Manchester, Salford, and Manchester Metropolitan Universities); Napier University and the Edinburgh University Settlement Programme; the Northern Ireland Science Shop (linking Queens University Belfast and the University of Ulster); the Roehampton Institute MA in International Service Learning; and the Voluntary Community Service Learning Programme at Middlesex University. The new Higher Education Active Community Fund (HEACF), issued in June 2001 and funded by the DfES and the Home Office, raises the possibility that citizenship education and service learning could become an important feature of higher education in Britain by providing funding for the development of university/community partnerships.

Service learning is now developing internationally. It is no longer primarily confined to higher education in the USA and the UK but can now be found in the Philippines, Singapore, Mexico, Brazil and Japan, and more recently at the University of Jordan in Amman where it is linked to the Muslim faith and the development of civil society. In many of these cases the interest in service learning may be more with building social capital (cf Putnam, 2000) than with capacity building for democratic political participation. In South Africa a number of universities, including the University of Capetown, are developing university/community partnership programmes linking the university through student volunteers with the township communities (MacMillan and Saddington, 2000; Subotzky, 1999). These developments provide key opportunities for universities in these countries to work in partnership with NGOs and community organisations for sustainable community development (Gaventa, 1998; Shuman, 2000). They also provide opportunities for exchanges with other students from different global cultures and social, political and economic contexts. Universities can also play a
key role in developing networks for a global civil society and

These programmes in universities across the globe now
provide the opportunity for UK higher education students to
exchange with students from a variety of global communities.
This will enable students to develop both an understanding of
globalisation and an intercultural understanding of community
development across national and regional boundaries. Many of
the ethical issues raised in the excellent and recent DEA/AUT
publication ‘Globalisation and Higher Education’ (DEA/AUT,
1999) like international partnerships, human rights, and
sustainable development can be addressed by students
engaged in global service learning through international partnerships between universities. Middlesex University, for example, has established a Global Citizenship and Community Leadership Programme which provides learning opportunities for exchange students to learn about citizenship and community development in a global context. According to Benjamin Barber, ‘These civic efforts – the work of citizens rather than governments, or the work of governments reacting to citizens (and not just their own) – embody a global public opinion in the making, a global civic engagement that can alone give the abstraction of international politics weight’ (Barber, 2000). To what extent then can higher education institutions contribute to the development of a global civil society and assist local communities in having a democratic voice concerning the process of globalisation? To what extent do they provide for their students the opportunities to develop the key skills and capabilities to understand the process of globalisation which is shaping their lives so rapidly and enable them to develop as global citizens? What I have attempted to show is that service learning is an important new way of learning in UK higher education and increasingly in universities internationally. It is also a means to provide just such an education for global citizenship in UK and international higher education.

References

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